Buddhism and Empire

THE POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS CULTURE OF EARLY TIBET

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MICHAEL L. WALTER

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I dedicate this work to the memory
of my teacher, counselor, and good friend
Larry William Moses
1935–2008

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Even before I became engaged in this work, I was fortunate to have good friends with whom I engaged in stimulating conversations and from whom I was constantly learning. It is no exaggeration to say that this work would not be what it is without that good council and support.

The result of the intellectual processes which this book represents has been deeply informed by my friend and colleague, Christopher Beckwith. His numerous researches on the early life and language of the Tibetan peoples and their place in Central Eurasian culture have motivated me to consider their implications for the study of Tibet's early religious life. Through our countless conversations over many cups of coffee I became ever more deeply impressed by the soundness of his views, which time and again helped me make sense of the special nature of Tibetan culture during its Imperial period.

The general approach of my work, looking for the values of religion as embedded in political culture, was greatly influenced by the research of another good friend and colleague, the late Larry Moses, likewise a Professor in the Department of Central Eurasian Studies (retired) at Indiana University. For years he sought such connections in the *Secret History of the Mongols*, and much of his career has been spent in the study of the relationship between Buddhism and politics among the Mongolian peoples. He has kindly provided me with many insights gained through years of work on this subject.

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ABBREVIATIONS FOR FREQUENTLY-CITED WORKS

AEMA	*Archivum Eurasiae medii aevi*
AFL	*Ancient folk-literature from north-eastern Tibet* / introductions, texts, translations and notes [by] F.W. Thomas. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1957.
Annals	I.e., PT1288, IO750, and BM8212. The incomplete, year-by-year record of the official acts of the btsan-pos. They are given in order in volume two of the CDT.
AOC	*Acta orientalia Copenhagen*
AOH	*Acta orientalia hungarica*
BAI	*Bulletin of the Asia Institute*
BEFEO	*Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême Orient*
BKA' CHEMS	Byang-chub Rgyal-mtshan, Ta'i Si-tu. *Ta Si Byang Chub Rgyal Mtshan gyi bka' chems Mthong ba don ldan bzhugs so*. Xining: Bod Ljongs Mi-dmangs Dpe-skrun-khang, 1989.
BKA' YANG DAG	*Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma las mdo btus pa*. Attributed to Khri Srong Lde Btsan. Beijing Btsan-'gyur (Suzuki edition), Toyko, 1955, vol. 144, #5839. Citations are to page, column and line.
BOD KYI	*Bod kyi rdo ring yi ge dang dril bu'i kha byang*. Pe-cin: Mi-rigs Dpe-skrun-khang, 1984.
BRDA DKROL	Btsan Lha Ngag-dbang Tshul-khrims. *Brda dkrol gser gyi me long*. Pe-cin: Mi-rigs Dpe-skrun-khang, 1996.
BU CHOS	*'Brom Ston-pa Rgyal-ba'i-'byung-gnas kyi skyes rabs Bka' Gdams Bu chos le'u nyi shu ba bzhugs so*. Xining: Mtsho Sngon Mi-rigs Dpe-skrun-khang, 1993.
BUDDHAGUHYA (attributed)	*Bod rje 'bangs la brdzangs pa'i 'phrin yig AKA Rje 'bangs dang Bod btsun rnams springs pa'i la spring yig*. Beijing Bstan-'gyur, Suzuki ed. #5693. Also published in *Legs rtsom snying bsdus*. Pe-cin: Mi-rigs Dpe-skrun-khang, 1991, pp. 135–145. Page citations follow the 1991 edition.

BUSHELL “The early history of Tibet, from Chinese sources”. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. 1880.435–541.

CDT *Choix de documents tibétains conservès à la Bibliothèque nationale; complété par quelques manuscrits de l'India Office et du British Museum* / présentés par Ariane Spanien et Yoshiro Imaeda. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1978–1980.

Chronicle According to document PT1287 in CDT and the romanized text and translation in DTH.

DPA'-BO.1962 Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag 'Phreng-ba. *Dam pa'i chos kyi 'khor lo bsgyur ba rnams kyi byung ba gsal bar byed pa Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*. Published as: *Mkhas-pa.hi-dga.h-ston of Dpa.h-bo-gtsug-lag* / [reproduced] by Lokesh Chandra. New Delhi, 1962. Reproduction of a xylograph version of this standard historical work which may have been carved during the author's life.

DPA'-BO.1985 Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag 'Phreng-ba. *Dam pa'i chos kyi 'khor lo bsgyur ba rnams kyi byung ba gsal bar byed pa Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*. Pe-cin: Mi-rigs Dpe-skrun-khang, 1985. (Citations are from volume one unless otherwise specified.) Most passages cited from this work have been compared with those in the 1962 xylograph reproduction cited above.

DPYID KYI Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho, Dalai Lama V, 1617–1682. *Gangs-can yul gyi sa la spyod pa'i mtho ris kyi rgyal blon gtso bor brjod pa'i deb ther Rdzogs ldan gzhon nu'i dga' ston Dpyid kyi rgyal mo'i glu dbyangs*. Delhi: 1985.

DTH *Documents de Touen-houang relatifs à l'histoire du Tibet*. Paris: Libraire orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1940. Includes a romanization and translation of PT1287, “The (Old Tibetan) Chronicle” (CHRONICLE), a collection of legends and court traditions from a period shortly after the Imperium.

DUNG DKAR *Mkhas-dbang Dung Dkar Blo-bzang 'Phrin-las mchog gis mdzad pa'i Bod rig pa'i tshig mdzod chen mo Shes bya rab gsal zhes bya ba bzhugs so*. Pe-cin: Krung-go'i Bod Rig-pa Dpe-skrun-khang, 2002.

ESIN	"The cup rites in Inner-Asian and Turkish art". *Forschungen zur Kunst Asiens: in memoriam Kurt Edmann*. İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi, 1969, pp. 224–261.
FRANCKE.A.H.1926	*Antiquities of Indian Tibet*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Co.
GTAM PHUD	Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho, Dalai Lama V, 1617–1682. *Sku gsung thugs rten gsar bzhengs rin po che'i mchod rdzas… dkar chag Gtam phud deb khrims yig gi 'go rgyangs Sde bzhi'i sgo 'phar phye ba'i skal bzang*. Gangtok: Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, 1991, vols. 16–18.
IO	Inventory label for Dunhaung documents originally housed at the India Office Library in London, now kept at the British Library in the same city.
ISHIHAMA	Ishihama Yumiko. "On the dissemination of the belief in the Dalai Lama as a manifestation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara". *Acta asiatica*. 64.1993.38–56.
JA	*Journal asiatique*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JIABS	*Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*
JTS	I.e., the *Jiu tang shu*; see XTS
JUVAINI	Juvainī, 'Alā al-Dīn 'Aṭa Malik. *Genghis Khan: the history of the World Conqueror*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997.
KVS	The *Karaṇḍavyūhasūtra*. The editions consulted were those included in the MA .NI BKA' 'BUM and the Sde Dge Kanjur. The Sanskrit verse edition as published by Aditya Prakashan, Delhi, 1999.
"UNE LECTURE…"	Ariane MacDonald, "Une lecture des Pelliot tibétain 1286, 1287, 1038, 1047, et 1290". *Études tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou*. Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1971, pp. 190–391.

LI & COBLIN	*A study of the Old Tibetan inscriptions*. Taipei: Institute of History and Philology, Academia sinica, 1987.
MA ṆI BKA' 'BUM	*Chos Rgyal Srong Btsan Sgam-po'i Ma ṇi bka' 'bum bzhugs so*. Xining: [s.n.], 1991.
MAHÂVASTU	*The Mahāvastu / translated from the Buddhist Sanskrit by J.J. Jones*. London: Luzac & Co., 3 vols., 1949–1956.
MDV	The *Madhyavyutpatti*. In: *Tibeto-Sanskrit lexicographical materials: the Sgra sbyor bam po gñis pa, the dag yig Za ma tog, and the Dag yig Li śi'i gur khaṅ*. Leh: Basgo Tongspon Publication, 1973.
MPNS	The Mahayana *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* edited and translated by Ernst Waldschmidt. For the edition, see his *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 3 parts, 1949–1950. Also referred to here are two studies on special topics in this work, published in his "Wunderkräfte des Buddha. Eine Episode im Sanskrittext des *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*". Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. 1952.48–91 and *Die Überlieferung vom Lebensende des Buddha*, part two. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1948 (= Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. Philologisch-historische Klasse, Dritte Folge, Nr. 30).
MV	The *Mahāvyutpatti*. The two-volume D.T. Suzuki edition published in Tokyo as reprinted by the Suzuki Research Foundation in 1965, with the originally separately-published index by Sasaki. Numbers cited here refer to the entry number in this edition. References to *MV/Ishihama* are to the entry numbers of *A new critical edition of the Mahāvyutpatti: Sanskrit-Tibetan-Mongolian dictionary of Buddhist terminology* = 新訂翻訳名義大集. Tokyo: The Toyo Bunko, 1989.
OTC	Takeuchi, Tsuguhito. *Old Tibetan contracts from Central Asia*. Tokyo: Daizo Shuppan, 1995.
OTMET	*Old Tibetan manuscripts from East Turkestan in the Stein Collection of the British Library* / compiled by

	Takeuchi Tsuguhito. Tokyo & London: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies for Unesco, The Toyo Bunko [and] The British Library, 1997–1998. Cited by catalogue number (#) or page.
PT	Inventory label for Dunhuang materials collected by Paul Pelliot kept at the Bibliotheque nationale. All texts are cited from the *Choix de documents tibétains conservés à la Bibliothèque nationale* / présentés par Ariane Spanien et Yoshiro Imaeda. Paris: Bibliothèqu nationale, 1978–1979. Texts such as PT016, PT239, etc., are quoted here as they are; "corrected" spellings, etc., are found in some cases at the opening of the *Choix* where some texts have been typeset.
RASHID AD-DIN	*The successors of Genghis Khan* / translated from the Persian of Rashīd al-Dīn (Ṭabīb) by John Andrew Boyle. New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1971.
RHR	*Revue de l'histoire des religions*
RICHARDSON.H.1985	*A corpus of early Tibetan inscriptions*. London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1985. (Readings in LI & COBLIN are generally preferred.)
SBA BZHED.1961	*Une chronique ancienne de bSam-yas: sBa-bžed* / édition du texte tibétain et résumé français par R.A. Stein. Paris: Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1961.
SBA BZHED.1982	*Sba bzhed ces bya ba las, Sba Gsal Snang gi bzhed pa bzhugs*. Pe-cin: Mi-rigs Dpe-skrun-khang, 1982.
SBA BZHED.2000	*dBa' bzhed: the royal narrative concerning the bringing of the Buddha's doctrine to Tibet* / translation and facsimile edition of the Tibetan text by Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000.
SCEAR	*Studies in Central and East Asian religions*

SECRET HISTORY	*Monggol-un niġuca tobciyan*. Translated into English with copious notes by Igor de Rachewiltz: *The Secret History of the Mongols: a Mongolian epic chronicle of the thirteenth century*. Leiden: Brill, 2004. Citations of this translation are by either the numbered paragraph of the text (¶) or page number.
TJ	*The Tibet Journal*
TLTD	*Tibetan literary texts and documents concerning Chinese Turkestan*. London: Luzac & Co., 1935–1963. Quotations are from vol. 2 ("Part II: Documents"), unless otherwise noted.
TP	*T'oung pao*
TUN-HONG.1980	*Tun-hong nas thon pa'i Bod kyi lo rgyus yig cha* = 敦煌本吐蕃歷史文書. Pe-cin: Mi-rigs Dpe-skrun-khang, 1980.
TUN-HONG.1983	*Tun-hong nas thon pa'i gna' bo'i Bod yig shog dril* / Bsod-nams Skyid dang Dbang Rgyal gyis phyogs bsgrig dang 'grel bshad byas pa. Pe-cin: Mi-rigs Dpe-skrun-khang, 1983. (Reprint of TUN-HONG.1980.)
TUN-HONG.1992	*Tun-hong nas thon pa'i Bod kyi lo rgyus yig cha* = 敦煌本吐蕃歷史文書. Pe-cin: Mi-rigs Dpe-skrun-khang, 1992.
WALTER & BECKWITH.1997	Walter, Michael, & C.I. Beckwith, "Some Indo-European elements in early Tibetan culture". *Tibetan studies* / edited by Helmut Krasser… (et al.). Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997, vol. 2, pp. 1037–1054.
WZKM	*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*
XIYUJI	*Si-yu-ki = Buddhist records of the Western world* / Xuanzang; translated by Samuel Beal. London: Trubner, 1884.
XTS	The *Xin Tang shu*, partial translation from the posthumous works of P. Pelliot, along with translations of portions of the JTS/*Jiu Tang shu*, in *Histoire ancienne du Tibet*. Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1961.

INTRODUCTION

This is a study of early Tibetan religion. Because we understand a religion through the culture it lives in, this study is framed in the relationship between the political, social and religious values of a people. Anthropologists realize this, which is why we have, in general, learned much more about Tibetan religion from their efforts than we have from the work of textologists, whose primary activity has been to interpret doctrine, and who are often only exegetes. Research into authentically early sources shows that the principal context in which religion functioned during the period of the Tibetans' entry into history was as part of their political culture. Thus, we must address this relationship in order to understand the function and nature of Buddhism in Tibet.

Tibetan religion, and especially Tibetan Buddhism, has been extensively studied. From an early date this activity was the domain of Indologists, who saw Tibetan translations as a resource for studying Buddhist texts whose original versions in Indic languages were lost. This involved little need to understand the bases of Tibetan religion, or the subtle interactions that contacts between Indic and Tibetan religious concepts would have occasioned. Sinologists, Asian historians, and, most recently, Buddhist studies specialists have also occasionally researched the circumstances responsible for the shape Buddhism has taken in Tibet. Much of their research has been directed to the study of developments in Tibet that relate to Indian and Chinese religious traditions. The over-all focus of these studies has been on doctrinal and sectarian developments.

Research by social scientists has tended to be complementary to these interests. They have usually centered on the function of religious traditions on a local level and within Tibet's social structures. A few monographs have explored Tibet's unique politico-religious history, with the important implications this has for its relations with Nepal and Central Asia, the Mongols and Manchus. The methods employed in these works have been of a different order than those of Buddhist scholars and philologists. Buddhism in Tibet, in its later social and political contexts, has only occasionally been well studied.

All these approaches have points in common with the study of religion among other peoples of Central Eurasia. Those disconnects in

data and context which have adversely affected the diachronic study of religion and politics among many peoples are also found in Tibetan studies. Most of these are the result of historians, religionists, and social scientists staking out areas so as to define the boundaries and nature of selected phenomena within their purview. For example, historians often describe a ruler or dynasty in simplistic terms, as strictly following or favoring this or that religion. Religionists complement this by often defining and then concentrating on 'traditions' or '-isms'—their relationship with others, how their followers behave as a unit in following certain doctrines or beliefs, etc.

These studies seem to make sense in some areas, especially when there is a vast written tradition. For example, China has produced a vast amount of self-referential material, and India also has a wealth of written sources. It has sometimes seemed easy to draw from them conclusions about the social and political dimensions of their religious beliefs. However, peoples who built vast empires in Central Eurasia, such as the Scythians, Turks, Xiongnu and Mongols, have left little detailed evidence for us to understand their religious beliefs on their own terms. Because of this, in many cases very little progress has been made in these studies, with many of the same things being said about these peoples and their beliefs today that were written when Western scholarship on them began.

Such an approach has also been characteristic of Tibetan studies. Most efforts to study Tibet's religious history do not take into account social and political contexts. (Earlier research often was influenced by Jung, for example. Ronald Davidson is a scholar who has recently engaged in presenting a more comprehensive viewpoint.) Likewise, when the religio-political beliefs of specific Tibetan times, areas, and leaderships are examined, it has usually been only on the basis of documents from one tradition and time. The search for general patterns and historical continuities has not been pursued. This shows the need for the present effort to identify some early social and political structures that became abiding elements in the form that religion, especially Buddhism, has taken in Tibet.

To begin with, among the most obvious characteristics which define Tibetan Buddhism are the power and place of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, and the dominant position of monks in society. Closely related with these is the institution of the *sprul sku* or 'incarnate lama'. How and why did these institutions develop, and what do they tell us

about the relationship between Buddhism and Tibetan culture? The power of these beliefs cannot at all be adequately accounted for by looking only at normative Buddhist doctrine or literature. To understand how these beliefs developed as they did we need to look at the broader context in which they functioned, and still do function.

These characteristics are deeply rooted and resilient. Their persistence must rest on a connection with ancient cultural values which have long determined the place of religion in society. We can demonstrate this if we can find models for these beliefs and the structures around them in ancient times. Since the Buddhist traditions listed above represent sets of political and social leadership as well as expressions of religiosity, it is necessary to look at the intersection of religion, politics, and society in their early expressions to find the bases for their present importance.

It order to find these intersections, my book examines various political and religious beliefs through several categories. This is one method which may help us understand interrelationships among the scarce early data we have; it would be difficult to appreciate the complexity of these important concepts only on the basis of a serial examination of sources. The categories pursued in this work are, in order, the historical/cultural, terminological, and ritual. The fourth category covers important concepts that are even more isolated; data about them are so scattered that creating a broader context for their understanding is highly problematic. This plurality of approaches acknowledges what studies of politics and religion have almost always revealed: that there is no single system to account for the elements of great polities; no one approach can be expected to make sense of the political and religious elements found at a court or in a multi-ethnic society.

Each chapter ends with concluding remarks and methodological observations about the study of religion in early Tibet.

We know that religion adapts to varying conditions over time. Many beliefs and practices have come into being and disappeared as political and social realities have changed. Therefore, this work must analyze its sources and data in a chronological manner. The few documents verifiably from the Imperial period provide the basis for this analysis; they are supplemented by later Tibetan sources and data from surrounding cultures which have been chosen because they help create a context for understanding early Tibetan politics and religion.

Even though Buddhism has provided many constants of Tibetan culture, the key to understanding its role is to observe its adaptations over

time. Thus, connections with more recent political and religious systems are briefly discussed, in particular in Chapters Three and Four.

The nature of our sources, their paucity and the various agendas they represent, requires that we orient our efforts around specific topics, as described above. Thus, the organization of the chapters is topical. In addition, in order to examine details of belief and practice in different contexts, some topics are addressed from different points of view at several places in this work. References to chapters and endnotes, as well as the index, connect the reader to other discussions of the topic.

Bibliographic references are generally limited to sources and studies directly pertinent to the topics discussed. In general, earlier studies have based their interpretations of religion in early Tibet on later mythological and cosmological traditions, which until now have been the chief source of such information. These later sources have actually preserved few accurate memories of the lives and reigns of these figures, as is shown in this book and in a few specialized studies which compare the truly ancient sources with later literature. Since we have no reason to believe that these later Tibetan works provide accurate materials for understanding the political and religious life of the early period they pretend to inform us about, I have generally not included them or studies which depend upon them, unless they pertain specifically to points I discuss.

This work deals with the earliest period of Tibetan history for which we have data extensive enough to allow a reconstruction, albeit incomplete, of their society, and especially of its leadership. It is the hope of the author that those who read this book can picture this world with more clarity than previously possible, and can appreciate its unique qualities. It is only through such an approach that we can fairly judge both its distance from later Tibetan civilization as well as the degree to which it established models for the relationship between religion and politics which obtain until today in that culture.

PROLOGUE ON OLD TIBETAN

The most important sources for studying the history of a people's religion are the earliest and verifiably emic data. In the case of Tibet, the number and extent of documents satisfying such criteria are very small. As is generally known, they fall into two groups: Inscriptions dating with certainty to the reigns of the btsan-pos, most still extant in Central Tibet, and those documents and fragments from sites in the Central Asian colonial territories of the Tibetan Empire in what is now Gansu and East Turkestan (Xinjiang).

These materials are written in a language known as Old Tibetan, which is actually a cover term used to describe the language of the early written Tibetan materials as well as isolated terms and phrases recorded in Chinese sources. It is a cover term because, in order to describe the language of the documents as Old Tibetan and to place them in even a relative chronology, recourse must be made to grammatical, syntactic, stylistic and orthographic features considered together. None alone is sufficient to positively identify their age, and few occur as a set in one group of materials.[1] The inscriptions must remain our standard on these points. Those documents which possess the strongest characteristics from all these categories, or those few which are datable to the earliest periods, must be considered truly Old Tibetan; all else—nearly all the written documents from Dunhuang—fall into one or more gray areas.[2]

These gray areas are due, in part, to our ignorance of the development of writing in the above colonial territories. Many documents from these areas were composed in a language and orthography which incorporates some of the above elements, and they are also normally referred to as Old Tibetan. However, it is known that, particularly in Dunhuang, a very conservative writing style preserved its earliest elements for a long period of time. This makes a detailed stratification of the forms of written Tibetan, the history of its orthography, difficult.[3]

Chronology is not the only consideration here. The importance of stylistic features for the study of politics and religion in this period is obvious. We *know* that the major inscriptions were court productions. Therefore, they cannot be doubted to represent the religio-political thinking of that institution at that time. There are a few other undated

documents and fragments from Gansu and Eastern Turkestan which *might* be official products of the Imperium.[4] However, the reliability of their contents is always open to doubt because, despite the obvious antiquity of some, we cannot say that they possess that same *bona fides*. The only Old Tibetan document from Dunhuang which has the same bona fides as the inscriptions is the *Annals*. It is our only other example of an "official" court production, and it was written in a language and style more similar to the inscriptions than other documents from Gansu and Eastern Turkestan. These qualities also distinguish it from the *Chronicle*, which contains some ancient traditions but almost certainly dates to the post-Imperial period.[5] Some other truly Old Tibetan documents with imperial vocabulary and references to court beliefs may be called into question because of their origins. Some are almost certainly translations, such as PT1047. Because they may contain popularized or inaccurate representations of court beliefs, or popular foreign concepts, they do not have the standing of documents composed under the Imperium.[6] In other cases, such as some texts in the AFL, concepts from the Imperium have been adapted for specialized purposes which may take them far from their original meaning. Of course, these also lack the standing of the inscriptions and the *Annals*. (On referring to the Tibetan Empire in this work as an Imperium, see Chapter One, n. 1.)

Based on this analysis, we may establish a provisional hierarchy of the accuracy of Tibetan sources for reconstructing religion during the Imperium.[7] The inscriptions and the *Annals* (which latter, unfortunately, has virtually no religious content), are our most direct sources. After these come truly ancient Old Tibetan materials from late in the Imperium; prominent here is PT016/IO751. Then there are documents with significant early content that were most likely composed shortly after its fall, such as the *Chronicle*. The sources which are most removed from the Imperium are the vast majority of other Dunhuang documents that are demonstrably not Imperial-period for a number of reasons. The contents of many fail to consistently match with one or more of the categories mentioned above. Many others are not written in the Old Tibetan language, some being virtually modern in style and expression—a sort of language sometimes called Pre-Classical Tibetan. This could separate them by centuries from the courts of the Tibetan Empire, thus greatly diminishing our confidence in their value as

sources. Despite these problems, some of them have been asserted to have such value and have been cited as such in scholarly studies.

This is not the place for the sort of detailed paleographical and stylistic analysis which could assign these documents a relative chronology through the categories described above. Such a topic would be better pursued in a comprehensive analysis of the early stages of the Tibetan language, such as in a detailed grammar. However, some general paleographical observations may be made. The following orthographic characteristics of Dunhuang documents are not, in and of themselves, dependable indicators of great antiquity, not to mention proof that they were produced during the Imperium: The use of reversed *gi gu*s (although sweeping, rounded *gi gu*s written in both directions are characteristic of the earliest documents); *da drag* not used with preterite verbs in correct syntactic position, and most nonstandard spellings.[8] The *ya btags* used with *ma* and *mi* is also problematic. The *ya btags* is certainly a characteristic of truly Old Tibetan materials, but it also has been preserved because it is a linguistic feature of the northwest Tibetan culture area. It has continued to be used in what are clearly more recent texts, both from Dunhuang and elsewhere, so it is not a reliable indicator of the antiquity of a document.

Some orthographic features are at least strongly indicative of antiquity. The most distinctive of these is the letter called by non-Tibetans *'a chung* or *a chung*. In the inscriptions it seems usually to be capped by a right-bending hook, which can easily be seen in the plates in RICHARDSON.1985. This feature is also found in most Imperial-period documents from Gansu and Eastern Turkestan, although it does not consistently appear in the written contracts dating to that era which have been reproduced and studied by Takeuchi Tsuguhito in *Old Tibetan manuscripts from Eastern Turkestan in the Stein Collection of the British Library*. Therefore, when we find it used often in some old documents, such as PT1287/*Chronicle*, we are uncertain whether it is a mark of antiquity or an affectation, perhaps even a deliberate imitation of the *Annals* or the inscriptions.

With regards to the orthography of Tibetan letters as a whole, the following observation is useful. Examining the photograph of the Treaty Inscription of 821/822, we can see that already by that time the *dbu can* Tibetan letters had reached a form virtually indistinguishable from that of the modern period. Therefore, when we find what seem to be earlier forms of letters in handwritten *dbu can* and *dbu med* materials from

Dunhuang, we may be tempted to consider them to be much older. However, once again with recourse to the facsimiles of the contracts in the work of Takeuchi, we see that nearly all of these are dated to a period near to or *after* that inscription was carved. Thus, once more, we should not consider the mere appearance of an archaic style to be an indicator of great antiquity. Much work remains to be done to establish standards for even a relative chronology for Tibetan paleography.

Unfortunately, most truly ancient Dunhuang documents are secular in nature, like the *Annals*, and thus contain only sparse references to religious beliefs. The majority of the latter concerns Buddhism. Therefore, we are left with a very small amount of reliable information indeed upon which to 'reconstruct' the religion (and politics) of the Imperium as written by those with direct knowledge of it. If one had to estimate the ratio of the amount of information about the Imperial period in contemporary documents to that we find in later documents, including histories of the Dharma and mythological materials, it is one to the hundreds or even thousands.

Of course, 'Old Tibetan' is not solely a philological concept. Because it is the written medium of a particular period in Tibet's history, materials composed in it may be expected to carry characteristics of that time. However, there are some characteristics of later Old Tibetan and non-Old Tibetan texts which betray concerns of a later time, after the office of the Btsan-po and the Imperium were either wholly or mostly removed from the scene. The following motifs do not occur in the few unquestionably early (Imperial-period) materials we have, and many represent realities and attitudes which would likely not have been communicated by the Imperium, but are well represented in later sources. (The *Sba bzhed* traditions offer good examples of several of these.)

1) Obsession with Glang Dar-ma as an evil emperor, and his assassination by Lha Lung Dpal-gyi Rdo Rje.
2) Preoccupation with Bon-pos and Mu-steg-pas and how they harmed Tibet, in particular during Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's reign.
3) Dramatic motifs about obstacles to the plans of the btsan-pos, opposition of noble clans to Buddhism, etc., especially if provided with great detail. (We are pretty sure there was almost constant opposition to the plans of btsan-pos, and not only as regards Buddhism, but on what basis and by whom we are usually not at all sure. Too much detail may betray later elaboration.)

4) Any text or motif which shows the btsan-pos in a subservient position to any religious teacher, Buddhist or Bon-po. (Of course, even if this did happen, it would not be a part of any official court record. In any event, we have no evidence of such a dynamic, which would be counter to usual court realities.)
5) Mythological narratives about the btsan-pos which refer to their light-nature, or that they ascend a *dmu thag* upon death. These ideas come from later Buddhist tradition.[9]
6) References to the ruler as *rgyal po* rather than *btsan po*.

Most of these points are addressed below.

A final observation: All students of humanities are aware that old ideas may be found in later materials, and that ideas found in old documents may be innovations, not part of some hoary antiquity. The intersection of religion and politics in particular gives rise to reinterpretations and reinventions of tradition intended to serve immediate needs. Therefore, until we have established some chronology for our oldest Tibetan documents, and then studied them critically with regard to later traditions, we will be seriously hampered in our efforts to understand the processes that were at work in the early religio-political system of Tibet.

Endnotes

[1] András Róna-Tas, in *Wiener Vorlesungen zur Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte Tibets* (pp. 95–101), undertakes a detailed schematization of the earliest layers of written Tibetan. He equates the beginning of Old Tibetan with the founding of the Tibetan Imperium (a term explained here in Chapter One, n. 1), and then proceeds to detail three subsets of the language within that period. The first is Early Old Tibetan, which he states obtained from its inception until 650. The evidence the author cites for this comes from indirect and non-Tibetan sources. Unfortunately, no sources that we have can be fixed to this period of Tibetan history. In other ways also his study is much too detailed for the available evidence. In any event, the author brings forth no linguistic evidence which would justify these periodizations. They are more a hypothetical conceptualization than historical schematization.

[2] The only dated documents we have from the Imperium are the inscriptions of the btsan-pos and some commercial and legal documents. The inscriptions have usually been dated approximately as by Róna-Tas, *op. cit.*, p. 99f: Zhol, 764; Bsam-yas, 779; Phyong Rgyas, 797; Zhwa'i Lha Khang, 805–812; Rkong-po and Skar Chung, 810–815; Khri Lde Srong Btsan tomb, 815; and, the Sino-Tibetan Treaty, 821–2. Fifty-eight contracts in OTC are dated with some precision (by animal cycle, for example), a few with certainty.

Unfortunately, for the present study we are still limited to the transcriptions provided by Hugh Richardson in *A corpus of early Tibetan inscriptions* (otherwise RICHARDSON.H.1985). The rather poor photographs which accompany this study are quite useful, for lack of any better reproductions, and one can actually compare

Ngawang Narkyid's transcriptions with these images in some cases. The differing readings found in Li & Coblin's *A study of the Old Tibetan inscriptions* (otherwise LI & COBLIN) are based, in part, on the use by its authors of a variety of rubbings and photographs, including Richardson's. Although a better textual study, not including these resources in their work requires continued dependence on the photographs in Richardson's work. On the history of rubbings, etc., of the Rkong-po inscription, see Helga Uebach, *Ein Beitrag zur Dokumentation der Inschrift von rKoṅ-po*, esp. pp. 5–7. One should also consult Samten Karmay, "Inscriptions dating from the reign of Btsan po Khri Lde-srong-btsan". *Tibetan studies*. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997, vol. 1, pp. 477–486.

We will not discuss here punctuation in the inscriptions and Old Tibetan documents. One may consult on this the website, "Reading Tibetan manuscripts: punctuation and ornamentation", at *readingtibetan.wordpress.com*.

[3] The only disciplined study of the paleography of early Tibetan documents is that of Jacob Dalton, Tom Davis and Sam van Schaik, "Beyond anonymity: paleographic analyses of the Dunhuang manuscripts". Following procedures used in forensic handwriting analysis, the authors suggest that large numbers of manuscripts previously considered to be from the Imperial period actually date to the tenth century. Such a later dating corresponds to suggestions made here for other works based on their phraseologies or the conceptions contained in them. For other valuable studies on Tibetan paleography, see the articles by Géza Uray and Takeuchi Tsuguhito cited in n. 30 of the above article.

[4] We omit from this survey the numerous fragments of documents found at Miran, etc., many of which are almost certainly Imperial-period, but from which little useful data about beliefs of the time can be recovered. These have been gathered in an excellent study by Takeuchi Tsuguhito in OTMET.

[5] Although it contains the largest amount of surviving religious and mythological data about the Imperium, and much of it accords with other early beliefs found in the inscriptions, it is certainly post-Imperial. It may date to as late as the early eleventh century, based on a lack of truly ancient spellings and the conservative writing style that can be seen in many other undated Dunhuang materials, some clearly late.

Among other clear indications that it is not an Imperial-period document are its contents. It is clearly a resume of activities at various courts, told from a perspective of some distance. The prominence of the noble clans, in fact, indicates that it was actually composed for their greater glory, and this makes more sense in a post-Imperial environment. Further evidence of this is the title *rgyal po* 'king' occasionally used for the rulers, as at line 338. Documents from the Imperial period do not use that title; only *btsan po* 'emperor' is used. (On the use of the latter term see Christopher Beckwith, *The Tibetan empire in Central Asia*, p. 14n.) A comparison of the terms *rgyal po* and *btsan po* is found in Chapter Four, below.

How all of this affects our interpretation of data contained in the *Chronicle* is beyond the scope of this work. However, as with other works of uncertain date cited here, a provisional approach is to give some credence to those motifs, narratives, etc., which best accord with the little truly early datable data—especially that in the inscriptions—that we have.

[6] Many dice-divination texts show such a strong similarity with the Old Turkic *Ïrq bitig* that the connection between them is "beyond coincidence", according to Takeuchi Tsuguhito at OTC.4.

[7] Of the foreign sources, the Chinese and Arab historical accounts all date to the post-Imperial period, with the exception of the pre-Imperial period (the Fuguo text), on which see the dissertation of Christopher Beckwith (*A study of the early medieval Chinese, Latin and Tibetan historical sources on pre-Imperial Tibet*, p. 84ff), and the Tang-period *Tongdian* of Du You, who lived from 735 to 812.

[8] This includes conjugations outside of those in the many verb tables (*re'u mig*) one could consult. Comparing the data in these, one quickly comes to the conclusion that there are no established, standard forms, and probably never were. Therefore, it is difficult to trace with any certainty changes in verbal morphology over time.

[9] E.g., the idea of the 'sky rope' almost certainly originated in Central Asian Buddhist funeral customs. Tombs in the Turfan region in the period just before the rise of the Tibetan Imperium were often equipped with silk yarn of great length through which the dead—local nobility—could climb to heaven with the guidance of monks. On this, see Xinri Liu, *Silk and religion*, p. 60f.

This custom and beliefs surrounding it could easily have been introduced to the Tibetan court by monks, especially those from Khotan. If it was practiced there, only for a brief time, there would have been sufficient impetus to establish the tradition of a *dmu thag*, which then underwent local development.

CHAPTER ONE

RELIGION AND POLITICS IN TIBET'S IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT, AND THE PLACE OF BUDDHISM THEREIN

Politics and publication

While many dates and events in early Tibet have been given at least a relative chronology, its religious history, considered in relation to its political life, has remained obscure. Since much of this obscurity resides in its surviving documentation, it seems a good idea to begin with an observation which might help explain this: Nearly all genuine Old Tibetan documents are official or quasi-official products of the Tibetan government, which we refer to here as an imperium.[1] In these official documents, and those of its representatives, references to the government or functionaries in them show that nearly all such documents were created under the aegis of the Imperium (prominent in CDT), or with a view to it; this includes the most minor, such as bills of sale and letters of request to government officials (prominent in OTMET).

Buddhist texts, and most others that are authentically Old Tibetan, should also be considered with an eye toward the Imperium, as the doings of monks and monasteries were of value to the court, used by it, and subsidized by it. Most composing and copying work must have passed at least an informal *imprimatur*. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that we should expect to see the internal religious structure of the Imperium, directly or indirectly, in these works. Scholarship has not made much effort to fit this literature into broader contexts, but we need to do this to understand better the political and religious culture of early Tibet.[2]

Looking into the purposes these documents served, we can gain a clearer picture of the religious and political world of those who created the Old Tibetan materials.

Let us consider literature copied from or based upon Chinese models. This includes the "translation" of the *Shujing*, PT986, which is really a Tibetan rendering of an early Chinese commentary on the *Shujing* yet to be identified. In this work (as well as in the similar PT1291), Tibetan religio-political terminology is freely substituted for the Chinese; no

attempt is made to render or interpret the Chinese terms. This created what is not a translation, and certainly not an explanation, but an adaptation. Clearly, these documents are meant to be vehicles for the promulgation of Tibetan Imperial concepts, not for the interpretation of Chinese concepts by Tibetan readers. The idea behind the work which is PT986 seems to have been to ratify Tibetan imperial vocabulary in a foreign context, thus "universalizing" its validity, especially to the borders of its competitor for trade, China. This explains the use of terms which would make no sense in a Chinese context (e.g., *sku bla, gnam gyi chos*, *gtsug lag*, etc.; cf. TUN-HONG.1983.114ff). Tibetan religio-political concepts were communicated to the Chinese and their government in Tibetan areas in order to create a sense of equality *among Tibetans* with Chinese in the realm of statecraft.

Are these among the works mentioned early on (JTS.5; cf. also BISCHOFF.F.1968.13) to have been those Chinese "classics" studied by members of the Tibetan royal family? We may at least conclude that a number of Chinese works were known and studied at an early period; that we have at least one case of the adaptation of a passage in a Chinese classic in an Old Tibetan document ("A passage from the Shih chi in the Old Tibetan Chronicle", by Takeuchi Tsuguhito, *Soundings in Tibetan civilization*, New Delhi, 1985, pp. 135–145); and, that PT986 and PT1291 were probably translated from a collection like the well-known *Wen xuan*. Their creation means only that Tibetan court circles had an early knowledge of Chinese political terms and concepts; we have no idea what significance they had beyond their utilization discussed above. The chief practical Chinese influence at the Tibetan court still seems to have been on bureaucratic practices, and this has not been shown to have had profound political implications. (And even Tibet's bureaucratic customs show no more than a passing influence; cf. G. Uray, "La pratique bureaucratique au Tibet ancien", JA.243.1975.157–170, and his "L'emploi du tibétain dans les chancelleries des états du Kan-sou et de Khotan postérieurs à la domination tibétaine", JA.269.1981.81–90.) More significantly, no such influence is seen in either the *Annals* or the *Chronicle*.

Of a considerably different nature are the inscriptions in Old Tibetan. The mere fact that they appear publically, in stone—although most had fuller texts on rolls accompanying them—means that we must analyze them on their own terms. It has been argued that, in its inception, "writing was primarily an activity of the state", an aid for the government to communicate, all the way in time and space from ancient Egypt and

Mesopotamia to China. It primarily served the needs of administration and bureaucracy (see J. Kelly, "Writing and the state: China, India, and general definitions", as well as other entries in *Margins of writing, origins of cultures*, Chicago, The Oriental Institute, 2006, p. 27). This helps us understand the separate function of the inscriptions, and that raises questions about literacy at that early period. Like the Old Turkic inscriptions, they tell how the leadership served and protected their people. Unlike the Turkic texts, however, their primary purpose—present as an element in almost all—is to communicate majesty and hierarchy. This raises the question: Who would have read them?

To elaborate on some of these points:

There is no evidence that the *Annals* were meant as public documents, while the inscriptions were. Thus, the messages of these two sets of materials were not the same, despite much common vocabulary. We must also take care not to compare the inscriptions too closely with many of the political documents found at Dunhuang. (They may have been composed literally centuries apart, and it is only commonsensical to assume that the meanings of some terms would have changed over time. We also know that many such terms were, in fact, polyvalent—as shown in the next chapter—and this is also a call for caution.)

The inscriptions, for example, have a distinctive structure and phrasing which show that the Imperium was quite capable of uniting its religio-mythological bases with administrative communication to take advantage of both, something unnecessary in documents not meant for public consumption. In varying proportions, the inscriptions are made up of an opening which provides the mythic basis for the rule of the btsan-po; this is followed by the message which the inscription was created to give. The concluding section lists, *inter alia*, witnesses who swore oaths to follow the commands of the inscriptions, instructions for its future use, the deposition of copies, etc. A perusal of the materials in RICHARDSON.H.1985 suffices to illustrate this structure clearly.

The significance of some of the exalted titulature in the inscriptions will be discussed in the next chapter.

Writing and literature are subjects inseparable from the creation and maintenance of the Imperium. As we will see in the coming section, monks could have been the authors or translators of any and all of the works mentioned here. Literacy may well be the most enduring evidence of the early, intimate connection between Buddhism and imperial power in Tibet.[3]

Buddhism and society

There are many examples in Old Tibetan documents of the nexus between the government, the Sangha, and the nobility (a topic which concerns us often here) and how this was institutionalized from an early period. We may even see in this how the concept of the monastery itself developed in Tibet. It turns out that the term for "monastery", *dgon*, has another—perhaps earlier—military application, one which is also related to its Buddhist function. First, we note the functional similarity between monasteries and fortifications: Both were created for, and administered by, members of the aristocracy; monasteries were also centers of tax collection and places where monks performed other functions for the Imperium which required some degree of security. (Shared defensive features of the architectural structures used by the nobility and monks in Tibet are noted at p. 52f of *Dimore umane, santuari divini = Demeures des hommes, sanctuaires des dieux*, Rome, 1987.) Tibetan society was highly regimented at this time, and this is one example of how this impacted Buddhism. (Note that in the Zhwa'i lha khang inscription, W27, as later, the small stone shrines holding copies of the inscriptions were called *mkhar bu*, "little fortified centers"; cf. RICHARDSON.H.1985.48.) The later *Sba bzhed* traditions note that monks acted as *khab so*, a term of imprecise meaning today, but which probably referred to the fact that they collected taxes for the Imperium in occupied areas. (On this see SBA BZHED.2000.73.)

This may also explain the relationship between *dgon* and *'phongs*, which was addressed by F.W. Thomas, and then Géza Uray, when discussing their apposition in PT2218/TLTD.II.67–71 (see the latter's "Notes on a Tibetan military document from Tun-huang", AOH.12.1961.223–230; cf. p. 228).

In these documents, *dgon* was a term for aristocratic groups. They may have fought from fixed or defended positions, from which the positions themselves came to be called *dgon*. (Its apparently early meanings centered around the ideas of: an isolated, waterless spot, or the top point of a ravined area—a good defensive position—on which see compounds in BRDA DKROL and other lexicons.) The *'phongs* were probably, as Thomas and Uray have agreed, "archers". They were more mobile—and hence more exposed—fighters, the equivalent of those medieval European serfs who were employed to loose arrows and then drop back. The *'phongs* appear to have been paired with and commanded by the *dgon*, whom Uray (*op. cit.*, p. 228) noted were "all

socially outstanding persons, such as the commander and *all monks*." (The italics are mine.)

Monks were included among the *dgon* not because the btsan-pos had given them greater status based on their religious vocation, but because monks were members of the nobility. That their elevated status did not depend on their religious calling is shown by the fact that we also can find reference in PT2218 to the lower (non-aristocratic) *lha 'bangs/lha ris kyi 'bangs*, commoners who served monasteries and temples but were not included among the *dgon*. [Uray, *op. cit.*, p. 229.] Clearly, the distinction here is based on social status—and hence military-leadership value—not function or religious affiliation.

Monks serving in the military must have been a common practice, not an exceptional occurrence. There is even mention of a *ban de tshan*, an organized military unit of monks serving in Khotan; whether they were all Tibetan, or included Khotanese, is unclear (OTMET.50.#152). Almost certainly it was a mixture, if we judge by the large number of foreign names of functionaries in Old Tibetan documents. It seems obvious that, during the Imperium, being a part of the military apparatus was more important, or more valued, than any other position in life. One reason for this would have been the duty of service to the btsan-po by members of the aristocracy as part of their oath of support to him.

This picture of monastic military and government duty (which latter seems to be what the obscure term *rje blas* meant) provides a dimension to Buddhist Sanghas in the Imperium far beyond what is routinely reported, e.g., about Newari Buddhists at Srong Btsan Sgam-po's court carrying out the design and ornamentation of structures during his reign, or monks going about their normal monastic duties. (Even Newari Buddhist service actually was much more lengthy and profound than sometimes appreciated. They also worked on Bsam-yas, and their influence on eastern Tibetan painting during Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's reign has been described at HELLER.A.1997.388f. This is a presence in Imperial Tibet spanning more than a century.) The variety of government duty required of monks is illustrated on the one hand by military service, and on the other by copying Sutras (in particular the *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Aparamitāyurnāma* Sutras) at the order of btsan-pos. The latter is only one of many examples of a Sangha benefiting the Imperium through religious effort. On copying Sutras and the meaning of *rje blas* in context, see OTC.33, 94, and 180.

That the Sangha in the Imperium existed at the behest of, and mostly to serve, the btsan-pos and the nobility shows much in common with

the early history of monasticism in early medieval Europe. Nobility dominated them as well, and for the same reason: they were useful to political authority, and preserving the power of the nobility for the maintenance of broader social order had great value. The monasteries of the Benedictine Order, Europe's earliest, were begun by local nobles as places where they would pray, and where people *would pray for the nobility.* (This information is available on a Benedictine website!) Early monasteries had little contact with each other until Charlemagne's son ordered the adoption of the Rules of St. Benedict, which, among other things, made their internal politics predictable. (Can we see a parallel here with the Bka'-gdams movement of the early Phyi Dar, with its allegiance to a supra-national Buddhist Vinaya?)

Because of systems of oathings and clan loyalty, only the conversion of the *leaders* of Germanic tribes could have guaranteed the conversion of those under them. This strikes one as just what happened, and is asserted, by later Tibetan historians; clans were either "pro-Buddhist" or not, based on whether their leaders gave oaths to support Buddhism, as exemplified by the paper version of the Bsam-yas inscription; see DPA'-BO.1985.372f. This process may have greatly affected the creation of the first Sanghas of Tibetans, regardless of whether foreign monks were also present. We will return to the topic of oathing.

Tibet was, even before the beginnings of the Imperium, ringed by cultures in which Buddhism was present, if not a dominant religion. (This becomes a persuasive argument for Srong Btsan Sgam-po having at least *known* about Buddhism and its political value.) Among such peoples, Buddhism is usually evidenced by the remains of its written culture, and this applies to the directions from which Tibet's alphabet may have come, Bengal of the Gupta era.[4] This makes it difficult to evaluate the religious contents of "non-Buddhist" Old Tibetan documents. We cannot demonstrate, and should not assume, that there was such a thing as a coherent, "nameable" pre- or non-Buddhist religion in Tibet, because we cannot show that any Old Tibetan document was created in a context completely free of the presence of Buddhist belief.[5] As we will demonstrate, there are texts, mythico-religious motifs, and religious terms which have usually been presented to be non-Buddhist, but which in fact are in all likelihood Buddhist or contain Buddhist elements. In addition to the idea of the *dmu thag* (see the Prologue, n. 8), examples discussed in this work include motifs in PT1286–1287, the famous *Chronicle*, the "mountain cult", and concepts such as *gtsug lag*.

The basis for prior assumptions about the stages of Tibet's early religion was a mixture of later Tibetan Buddhist teachings about their own history (based on Buddhist mythological motifs) mixed with a positivist interpretation of Tibet by Western scholars, nearly all Sinologists or Indologists. The assumption was that the Tibetans must have had a more "primitive" religion which was opposed to Buddhism because, 1) Tibetan culture (hence religion) was (and had to be) primitive before Buddhism arrived; and, 2) There are Old Tibetan documents which contain religious terms and concepts not clearly Buddhist, and certainly not normative Buddhist if compared with later schools in Tibet. Tibetans at some early date had a mythology surrounding their btsan-pos; combined with later literary traditions on the putative friction between Buddhism and Bon at Tibetan courts, Old Tibetan materials on these subjects were assumed to have been originally without Buddhist content. In order to fairly appraise the role of Buddhism in early Tibet, we need to understand the political culture of the Imperium and how religion fit into it. We cannot create a context for studying Tibetan religion in general if we do not first clearly explicate the cultural elements into which it fit. The best place to look for data on these points is in the most reliable contemporary or near-contemporary sources, which are sparse.

As stated above, writing in Tibet developed to further the administration of the Imperium. This is a gentle way of introducing its means for propaganda, its self-presentation. Old Tibetan documents of all sorts almost always evidence what the Imperium would allow or tolerate, what it supported. Documents adversarial to the Imperium are lacking; criticism is most clearly read in simple, non-political complaints about lack of provisioning, etc., in requests to higher authorities from occupied areas (see documents in OTM). There seems to have been no documenting of religious practices that it frowned upon, nor much curiosity about others. This does not mean such did not exist, of course. On the other hand, details about religious beliefs and rites *at* the court, including those performed by Buddhists, are also scarce. Such rites would have included consecration and ennobling rites, efforts to heal or keep leaders healthy, and acts of defensive and offensive magic—rituals supporting military success or the defense of the empire. (It is no surprise that some such rituals *can* be found in later collections of literature belonging to all Tibetan Buddhist traditions, although great antiquity cannot be asserted for the vast majority of them.) Most importantly, we have few rituals

and teachings about the broader religious ideology that supported the Imperium, beyond the charisma of the leadership.[6]

What we see in other courts in early Central Eurasian empires, such as those of the Scythians and Turks (as well as some dynasties in India and China), also reveals little about whatever principles might have supported their rule. The goal of the most public and significant documents produced by several of these—their inscriptions—was, first and foremost, the praise of the value of their system of rule. In them, the continued existence and well-being of each regime was presented to be the greatest priority for their subjects. There are general statements in these and other sources that the strength of their regimes rested on the support of spiritual powers which have some relationship with their leadership. (These were usually the guiding spirits of founders or previous leaders of the clan or confederation. We can see this idea expressed, at least archaeologically and anecdotally, among the Scythian leadership. The *lha* had the same function during the Imperium, and a similar one even now, as we shall see.) From the point of view of subjects and supporters, military success and sharing the wealth the leadership could provide were the most practical and important ways that these spiritual beings showed their power and that they deserved respect and worship. We are led to believe from these and other data that all these peoples used rituals and magic to support their strength, but that these complemented a very practical and worldly statecraft. Because empires are by nature hierarchies, with power concentrated in leaders at courts, there is often no need or desire to disseminate information about their perceived sources of power, such as that which lay behind Chingis. Some were commonly known among populations, others were even hidden from their own subjects, and there was a range of possibilities in between.[7]

Worship of spiritual beings thought to inspire or guide was part of a larger view, one which recognized that the world was full of other, perhaps equally powerful spiritual beings supporting other nations and empires. When one particular people believed that a powerful spiritual being supported them, they believed that the same situation applied to others. An attitude consistently found throughout pre-Islamic Mediaeval Eurasia is that omnipotence and omniscience are not to be expected from any spiritual being, even wise and powerful ancestors. This helps explain why, as far as we know, no pre-Islamic empire in Central Eurasia adhered to a single, coherently-expressed religious system upon which it based its achievements for more than a brief period of time.[8]

The traditional practice was what we might consider a more pragmatic approach, one in which, for a variety of motives, picking and choosing among what experience taught them to be the most useful or persuasive qualities of available traditions gave them valuable resources. The later Mongol Empire represents the apex of this development, or at least we have more textual attestations for this, such as inviting religious figures of many faiths to its court,[9] although the Tibetan Imperium also seems quite typical in this regard.

One virtue of this approach not lost on the Mongols was that it allowed maximum access to intelligence about spiritual forces in the world around them. As data from Siberian tribes has consistently showed, some spiritual beings within their ethnie (a population which persists through its collective traditions and cultural forms; this includes what we call ethnic groups or peoples) were considered friendly and protecting, while others were harmful and needed to be placated. Outside of these, there was a third class of spirits: Those belonging to other ethnies and/or areas. These were the powers behind enemies actual or potential, whose strength and intentions needed to be understood.[10] One of the expectations of the friendly spiritual beings of an ethnie was that they would help provide intelligence about, and protection from, these other spiritual beings. Religious specialists (e.g., "shamans") were, in part, valued for their ability to interpret these and inform about potential dangers.[11] Rulers also used religious specialists and others to gain the support of, or to neutralize, spiritual beings which foreigners might, or did, introduce to their courts and empires. In this way, the number of spiritual powers which might resist or attack them, or arm their opponents, or who might provide information about their court to enemies, was reduced.[12] The Mongols' "openness" to religions is an excellent example of a court which strove to acquire as much knowledge as possible of the spiritual beings and magical powers their subjects and enemies might possess, while they simultaneously also pursued "practical" routes of gathering intelligence about defenses, etc.[13] This was a habit first acquired because the various spirit-protectors of clans and tribes needed to be introduced to each other and harmonized as the Mongol confederation grew.[14] (It also had obvious value as a method of lessening tensions among the member tribes.) The early Tibetans, whose political structure was similarly a confederation and whose neighbors were always seen as potential adversaries, had very similar beliefs at their courts.[15]

Despite this, our historical tradition about things medieval, with its many projections based on European "Christian" court tradition, has led us to believe that rulers everywhere adhered to, or heavily favored, one particular religious system. Rulers have been simplistically described as "Buddhist", "Confucian", "Hindu", etc., even though the kingdoms they ruled present no close similarity with the more ethnically uniform Western European kingdoms of the late Middle Ages and modern times.[16] A "Buddhist" ruler of the Pāla Dynasty, contemporaneous with the Tibetan Empire, displayed a practical, non-sectarian approach to achieving dynastic stability through using Hindu religious specialists to protect the royal family.[17] Similarly, recourse to specialists from different countries and peoples was a common custom at Turkic and Mongolian courts. The Abbasid Court in Baghdad invited yogis and initially held learned Zoroastrians and Buddhists in high favor. Such traditions obtained into the Ottoman Empire. Similarly, the Tibetan court sought medical advisors from far-flung regions, opening the way to the introduction of Greek medical traditions to the Lhasa court at an early date.[18]

There is later data about rites designed to protect and serve the btsan-pos and the royal family. Despite later polemics, we have no evidence that *any* religion was systematically favored. Among these, we find Buddhist confession rites, brief descriptions of other rites in the *Sba bzhed* and other sources (see Chapter Three), as well as fragments of a funereal system for the btsan-pos which is believed by some to have been (at least partly) in the hands of Bon-pos.[19]

Indeed, it is difficult to believe that the rulers of the Imperium would have had a different attitude, since, in its early history, the Tibetan court was greatly influenced by Newars from Kathmandu Valley, where Buddhism and Hinduism had achieved a working harmony perhaps unique in South Asia.

Oaths and oathing

Materials produced by the Imperium which document doings of the courts, such as several Old Tibetan inscriptions and the *Annals*, are notably lacking in religious or ideological content apart from the mythology which supported the superiority of the btsan-pos.[20] Data on court doings (aside from treaty rites) are also not found in the best etic source about the Imperium, the Tang historical records, which otherwise

contain useful information about its religio-political customs. Security at court seems to have been such that, even in the presence of literate witnesses, the rites that bound it together and had to do with its inner workings remained largely a verbal affair. This may help explain why few details about life at court survived the Imperium to be described and re-interpreted in Phyi Dar materials. For example, the institution of oathing at the Tibetan court, for which we have a rich vocabulary and frequent references in old documents, did not require the production of written records. The creation of official writings, in fact, helped reduce its importance.

For some long period in early Tibet, in lieu of a vast paper-trail of the documentation of court doings produced and preserved by a bureaucracy in the hands of literati or monks, the glue that held the religion and internal politics of the Imperium together was this set of *oaths* taken among its aristocratic leaders and the btsan-pos. Confederations, as has been noted, were at the heart of most Central Eurasian empires,[21] and what held them together was oath-taking, a tried and true method which had evolved much earlier to bind ethnies together. Through it the loyalty and discretion of members of the court were assured, and this provided a stability which proceeded down through the layers of its administration and military organizations to its citizens.[22] The religious dimensions of oath-taking, treaty negotiations, and other political rites reflected the involvement and oversight of spiritual beings of all the groupings involved. International oath-taking to seal treaties was an extension of this; it was a way for the spiritual beings of different peoples—in this instance, the Chinese and Tibetans—to meet and oversee the efficacy of the process (even in the face of continual failure, it seems). This is why Chinese and Tibetan emperors both invoked spiritual beings at the conclusion of peace negotiations. This is also why we speak of treaty "rites", and include data from them.[23] As others have noticed, acknowledging and including spiritual beings as witnesses was a necessary, if sometimes formalized, method of solemnizing many court proceedings relating to both internal and external relations.[24]

There is a bewildering array of terms for oathing as a means of political and social binding. These revolve around the basic terms *mna'* and *tshig*[*s*], which generally can be described as "oath" and "word" (in the sense of a comprehensible statement), respectively. Among the terms and phrases which mean either "oath" in one way or another we find these in early (Old Tibetan) literature: *mna' bor*, *bka' tshig*[*s*], *tha tshig, mna' tshigs, mna' chad, mna' skyel*, and *mna' tho, bro bor*

ba, *bro stsal ba*, and compounds such as *dbu bsnyung zhing bro borro* and *dbu snyung bro mna' bor ba* (the latter at DPA'-BO.1985.370, 372, 376) which use these vocabulary elements in various ways. There are also compounds with *dam*, which is well explained as a member of the *sdom pa* family of verbs and nouns. While the detailed meanings of most of these remain imprecise because they are obsolete, the latter has remained formative in Tantric culture (*dam bcas pa'i tshig* = *dam tshig*; cf. *dam bca'*), and its use there is an example of a term retaining much of its older significance in a new, Buddhist context.

The term *dam* is also significant because it occurs very early, during the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, at the conclusion of the opening section of the extended (written) Bsam-yas edict (quoted from DPA'-BO.1985.371; compare the much shorter text of the inscription at RICHARDSON.H.1985):...*Sangs-rgyas-kyi Chos mdzad pa mi bzhig par Btsan-po yab sras dang sras kyi yum gyis dbu bsnyung bzung zhing yi dam bcas pa dang / phyi nang gi blon po che phra mtha' dag bro stsal ba'i gtsigs kyi yi ger bris pa'o*. This phrase concludes an assertion by Khri Srong Lde Brstan about deeds by his ancestors in support of the Dharma. It also records the swearing of his family and advisors to these deeds. Note that he and his family performed *dual* oathings, the second element Buddhist (*yi dam* for "vow" occurs in the Bsam-yas and Skar Chung inscriptions, and is clearly a Buddhist concept; cf. DPA'-BO.1985.371), which was not required of, or followed by, those ministers who were, apparently, simply witnessing Khri Srong's swearing of support to the Bsam-yas Sangha. This shows that a division in oathing customs—perhaps revealing a division in loyalty—had already begun. Rather than some general animus against Buddhism, it is possible that ministers became divided on whether to abandon swearing oaths of allegiance to their *lha* and to prefer allegiance of support to Buddhism and its spiritual beings. This may have been what was meant in the assertion that following Buddhism would cause damage to the Imperium; the old *lha* would no longer look well on oaths made by btsan-pos whose loyalty was divided.

Oathing was also central to constructing a *comitatus* or "guard-corps" complex, well represented at early medieval Central Eurasian courts such as the Tibetan. This dimension of oathing is discussed below.

Access to court was often based on the perception that a petitioner had resources that could help support the power, or even survival, of a court. The constant need for security, as well as the acquaintance of the court

with foreign peoples as conquests or new members of the confederation, created an environment which drew in a variety of practitioners and methods. Some of these teachings came to the Tibetan Imperium from India, Nepal, Khotan, and Indianized Northwest border regions. Among these were rites limited to the leadership, beyond whose circle they were not to be revealed. Thus, information about these has survived only by chance.[25]

Among such petitioners we should include Padmasambhava and the famous "invitation" Khri Srong Lde Brtsan extended to him.[26] After he entered the vortex of the btsan-po's court, a detailed description of exactly how he appealed to the leadership to approve and support his teaching was never recorded. While it may be assumed that this involved enhancing the status of that ruler through proclaiming Bodhisattvahood for him and his descendents,[27] no descriptions of these or other special rituals he offered to perform have been preserved, at least in Old Tibetan materials. Later, anecdotal material (mostly preserved in Rnying-ma literature) presents Khri Srong Lde Brtsan in such a subservient position to Padmasambhava that the likelihood they reflect court, and historical, reality must be considered doubtful at best.

We have considered some reasons for the secrecy which surrounded religious practices at court. Since we have no data disagreeing with the Tibetan tradition which says that Buddhism first came to that country through its courts, we now understand a little more clearly why there is such a lack of data showing how this happened. Although this book is, in part, an attempt to describe how Buddhism became fixed in Tibet's political and social fabric, because of such secrecy and the vagaries of history the data which has survived is only a small sample of what we need to create a clear picture of this process.[28]

Anti-Buddhist attitudes

Enmity towards Buddhism in the Imperium is often presented in later histories.[29] However, we have little contemporary information about that, or the causes of whatever friction there might have been among the clan leaders and advisors (*blon-po*s), on the one hand, and the btsan-pos, over matters of ritual and religion. Was this a function of the role of the various clans' spiritual beings, competing religious customs at court, or both? While much has been made of objections to Buddhist practices by certain clan leaders and advisors, these are vaguely described and

may well be only one artifact of a more complicated set of antagonisms among clans jostling for power at court. (Not only do these assertions occur only in texts composed long after the Imperium, they are also routinely a part of dramatic presentations of anti-Buddhist polemics by later writers who were, of course, almost exclusively monks.)[30]

This court "conflict" is well represented in later Tibetan sources, despite the fact that there is no contemporary evidence to support it. Rather than just trying to look at this situation 'objectively', we also need to put ourselves into the positions of the monks there. They would have been relying on the customs Sanghas at other courts had employed when dealing with the btsan-pos. However, we also have no direct evidence for such conflicts at Indian courts around this time. There seems no overall precedent for such conflict based on the experience of nearby Sanghas. In search of an example for this, we might begin with Aśoka (although the North Indian dynasties of the time of the Imperium also provide appropriate examples) and his relationship with the Sangha.

In the history of Buddhist polity, no figure is more significant. Yet, a central question about him remains, "What kind of a Buddhist was he?" Was he sincere, was he using Buddhism for political goals, or both? Was he even a Buddhist? Such questions are projections of modern thinking into traditional Asian political systems; the Mongol example shows the error of this approach clearly. Aśoka, in fact, is just another example of a ruler of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire. Sanghas in Tibet, whose principal orientation was toward India and Nepal, would not have had a precedent for an attitude of exclusivity or a propensity for feeling threatened at court: "The act of taking refuge, in traditional Indian culture, was a formal act of allegiance, submitting to the preeminence and claiming the protection of a powerful patron, whether human or divine. As this act became standardized in its Buddhist form, it did not necessarily imply an understanding or acceptance of the basic points of the Buddha's Dharma; nor did it mean aligning oneself exclusively with the Triple Gem," as the late Richard Robinson put it in *Buddhist religions: a historical introduction*, p. 32.

Court religion

The Tibetan Imperium was in many respects like other empires of its time; it was not an isolated phenomenon or a unique institution. We have already made several comparisons in this regard. This gives us more

confidence that the data we glean from neighboring and contemporary cultures may reveal similar structures. From these we can gain valuable information about how religion functioned for them, and we can use this—carefully—to create a context for the meager Tibetan data. The study of neighbors and contemporaries is also valuable because, as Medieval European courts have shown us, trends, fashions and attitudes travelled quickly. For Tibet, the closest comparisons can be made with other Central Eurasian empires in the Medieval Period, but we can go far afield with some structures that seem nearly universal for the time. Governments in Mediaeval Eurasia from England and France through China and Japan had "court religion". We may search them for similarities with the situation in Tibet. Indeed, we may better understand them all by looking at their commonalities, among which is how religion and imperial politics were inextricably bound in guiding empires.

Court religion in Persian, Turkic, Hindu, Chinese, etc., mediaeval cultures was, despite formal differences, always a semi-independent entity, a special resource of the leadership as well as a set of lobbies. This means that it was both an asset and a liability in preserving a unified government. It often resulted in juxtapositions many would think awkward, and which perhaps were: Manichaeans and Buddhists competing at the courts of Turkic *qaghan*s and Christian and Taoist practitioners at Mongol courts are just two examples.[31] What brought these traditions together was the attraction of a central power controlling vast areas and resources, providing both a haven and a support. Of course, in return for their admittance, their practitioners were expected to provide various benefits to those courts.

Ritual and practical concerns of the btsan-pos were the primary reason for the survival of Buddhism. It seems, from both Old Tibetan and later documents, that doctrinal details, which became so important, were insignificant outside of the Sanghas, and perhaps even within them, until late in the Imperium.[32] Competition for the valued position of providing service to the btsan-pos would have been the determining element in the early history of Buddhism in Tibet. There may well have been conflict among individual practitioners, and especially among native Tibetan Buddhists and what was a mixed population of foreign monks, perhaps until late in the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan. (There is no evidence of this, however, in authentically Old Tibetan documents.) It is important to remember that many monks had gained experience in being able to put their best feet forward in jostling for places at courts from India to China, and this would have stood them well in efforts to communicate with btsan-pos about what services they could provide.

Religions in Central Eurasia were carried from court to court by traders. Monks were often in their caravans. From early in the Imperium until perhaps its end, Newari artisans and teachers served btsan-pos. They might have been the dominant foreign influence overall. Behind the bare details of the refugee Khotanese monks who had monasteries built for them during the reign of Mes Ag Tshoms (704–755) lies the question of how they served in return for this largesse.[33] Such vignettes show that Buddhism entered Tibet as it had other empires and kingdoms: Trade had enabled Tibetans to see Buddhism at work at courts in Khotan and Nepal; as it served leaders at those places, so it could serve in Lhasa or wherever the *pho brang* or court of the btsan-po was. As far as we know, it was only because of its value at other courts that Tibetan rulers gave their attention to Buddhism at all. The monks of Khotan, for example, had established ritual methods for insuring the security of their country which were applicable anywhere.[34]

Buddhist monks and yogis, astrologers and diviners, all served the needs of the btsan-pos and the welfare of the Imperium; any practice seen to be of value came to be known at court. These participants in Tibet's "court religion" would have been bound by etiquettes and rules of presentation, as was common custom, and as the confession rituals and the De-ga G.yu-tshal document show.[35] The order of precedence at courts is also clear in later documents, but the details in them might be questioned because of a lack of direct knowledge by their composers. We at least know from contemporary documents that the supervision of Sanghas in Tibet was the charge of a group called the *Bcom-ldan 'Das-kyi ring lugs*,[36] one of a number of similarly-named "commissions" made up of members of the nobility, such as the *Zhing 'God kyi ring lugs* at OTMET.II.227#655, commissioners of land settlement, or the *Gcod Dbyong gi rïng lugs* in PT1081. Sanghas were obviously viewed as a branch of Imperial administration. Early Phyi Dar sources such as the *Sba' bzhed* versions and the *Bka' chems Ka khol ma* provide more details about how monks served the btsan-pos. However, these are primarily forward-looking documents, designed to show not so much what monks did long ago in court service, but to give some examples of what any legitimate ruler could expect to receive from a Sangha. (We may also question the accuracy of details in them because they may not be picturing court life as it actually was, but how it might be, as such *romantic* documents often do. In any case, this sort of literature is transitional. It played on the imperial past to create models for

services to courts which were, in reality, much less important than the monastic traditions in their own right.)

Service at courts is completely in accord with the long-standing *śramanic* tradition of seeking patronage. This is based above all on the model of the life of Śākyamuni himself.[37] This pattern, so strikingly consistent in Buddhism's spread throughout Asia, is undervalued in the study of the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet. The long-standing dominance of monks in Tibetan culture and their creation of histories showing Sanghas with a controlling presence at courts has affected the attitude of generations of Tibetans and foreign students as to who would have held the balance of power at the courts of the btsan-pos.

If we thus assume that making themselves attractive to the court was a priority of early Sanghas, we need to conceive how Buddhists would have gone about doing it. One obvious way was by making Buddhist concepts appealing to the leadership of the Imperium.

In China, one of the most significant early accommodations Buddhists made was in adapting Taoist terminology, perhaps in hopes of creating a new popular religion.[38] In Tibet, the abiding accommodation was also through the adaptation of terminology. However, in the latter case it was with that of the ruling elite at court, in order to create a nexus between Buddhism and the aristocracy which would benefit both groups.[39]

We do not know in detail how the Sangha in Tibet made such accommodations to the Imperium, outside of religio-political terminology, which we will look at in Chapter Two. We do know that, of monks present at the court in the period for which we have good information, the Tibetans among them were overwhelmingly—perhaps exclusively—of noble lineage.[40] (This might even mean that access to the Sangha was restricted.) We know that (as opposed to Chinese and Indian models) the Sangha was, at least late in the Imperium, thoroughly embedded in its administration, not merely providing specialized functions. The occupation and absorption of the Tuyuhun ('A-zha) may have provided an example for the Tibetans to follow.[41]

We are able to analyze court religion during the Imperium only in broad terms. It is even difficult to say, at this juncture, which institution is more key to understanding Tibetan polity and religion there, that of the btsan-pos and their immediate advisors, or the aristocratic clans. Since their power was based on different statuses, they could not be equivalent, and they have been seen to represent (at least in later sources) complementary forces. Each had its own mythological

justification, and these were similar but not identical as they have come down to us. The more one looks at it, the more one can see the fundamental schism at court. This had to have been included in Buddhist calculations for getting along there. It also means that the situation of Buddhists at court had to have been rather complicated.

The mythology of rule

The mythology surrounding the origin of the btsan-pos is very similar to that of the rulers of the Scythians.[42] It is a narrative whose only goal is to establish, without further context or argument, the categorical superiority of the ruling family. (This actually distinguishes it from that of the nobility-as-descended-from-*lha* motif so common among Tibetan noble clans, where the *lha* are traditionally connected with a mountain or other locality, and from which their power and status derives.)[43] Bruce Lincoln has termed the descent myth of the Scythian rulers a *regiogony*,[44] and this concept also applies to the special "mythology" of the btsan-pos. The only purpose of either was to assert the special nature of the rulers. This becomes, then, a circular justification for their right to rule.

For example, if we attempt to locate the family of the btsan-pos within Tibet's social hierarchy, we see that their lineage seems to have been isolated. In contrast, in other sections of the Tang Shu—those studied by Chavannes for the Turks and neighboring peoples, for example—the Chinese mention the family names of rulers and dynasties whenever they can. It is possible, and a point deserving of more research, that in fact Spu was the *family* name of the btsan-pos, from which a toponym eventually derived. This is why we have Old Tibetan compounds such as Btsan-po Spu Rgyal, "The Btsan-po [who is also] Spu King". (In accordance with Tibetan syntax, the more general category is given first in nominal appositions. So, Btsan-po had more general significance than Spu Rgyal; the latter title had only secondary importance.) It is interesting that in XTS.82 we find Fu Ye (Spu Rgyal) given, according to the French translation, as Srong Btsan Sgam-po's clan name, but it is, in fact, only an expanded version of his title, understood as such. It also should be explained how, if *Spu* were taken as a clan name, that clan would have a Rgyal[-po]. Although Ariane MacDonald has assumed this to be the case ("Une lecture…", p. 236 and 313), there is no reason to see Spu as the name of a clan, or of a family, without more information.

Why was the family or clan name of the btsan-pos not given? If Spu was, in fact, their family name, it seems not to have been recognized as such in Old Tibetan or later literature.

It might be argued that when (at least some of) the btsan-pos had been spiritualized and came to be considered Bodhisattvas, the significance of their human lineage would have diminished. However, as the opening of Kaḥ-thog Tshe-dbang-nor-bu's *Bod rje Lha Btsan-po'i gdung rabs Tshigs nyung don gsal yid kyi me long* (in *Rare Tibetan historical and literary texts from the library of Tsepon W.D. Shakabpa*, New Delhi, 1974) shows, their presences were born (*sku bltams*) in this world, and each was a father, so discussing genealogy would not have been contradictory (at least in the sixteenth century) to their exalted religious status. When shortly thereafter (columns 7ff) he recapitulates the oft-referred to Licchavi origin of the btsan-pos from the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, the author was certainly following a tradition borne as much out of sheer ignorance of the origins of the dynasty's family as from the desire to ameliorate it by fitting it into a Buddhist prophecy.

The obscurity of the familial origins of the btsan-pos distinguishes their place in Tibet's hierarchy from that of the leading families of early Turks (whose situation is complicated in a different way; cf. S.G. Klyashtorny, "The royal clan of the Turks and the problem of early Turkic-Iranian contacts", AOH.47.1994.445–47), and clearly from the descendents of Chingis Qan. However, there are a number of alternatives to make sense of this absence of data. Among these: That the institution of rule by a family producing btsan-pos was an invasive entity, foreign to the culture of a Tibetan Plateau ruled by various powerful clans. They thus stood separate from all beneath them, even the highest clan leaders and the important blon-pos at court. A second, which certainly does not exclude the first, is that political thinking in early Tibet accorded with Indo-European royal ideology: "Technically, [Indo-European] kings stand outside the social hierarchy, belonging to no class and to all classes... this is decidedly an ideological smokescreen which served to rally populations around their kings and to imbue kings with an aura of legitimacy and affection, however much they might pursue their own interests and those of the class from which they came." (Bruce Lincoln, "Indo-European religions" in *Death, war and sacrifice*, Chicago & London, 1991, p. 5.) This exactly described the btsan-pos.

In both the Indo-European and Tibetan cases, the ruling family came from a warrior group. Also, in both cases the ruling family was often

not a uniter of ethnies from within, but an organizer of ethnies from without, through the imposition of a strict hierarchy. (The multi-ethnic, polyglot Scythian confederation was a forerunner of many Central Eurasian empires, including the Tibetan.)

The Tibetan ruling family, like that of the Scythians and Germans, formed groups separate in class and space from their subjects. Ironically, perhaps, this distance was combined with the virtue of loving guidance to create a political patriarchy. Scythians referred to their ancestral leaders as their fathers (Herodotus), and Tibetans referred to their deceased ancestral leaders (*lha*) as *yab myes*, literally 'father[s]-ancestor[s]' in the inscriptions, a similarly literal honorific for "forefathers". The oldest formulation of this relationship is in the *Annals* (PT1288/IO750, lines 74 and 158), in the classically laconic lines dealing with Srong Btsan Sgam-po's interment: *pying bar btsan po yab gyï mdad btang ba*… "The tomb of the Btsan-po, the Father, constructed in Phying-ba…"

These similarities, by themselves, are too general to be significant. However, if we add details from other motifs the similarity becomes intriguing. The text that Richardson rendered from its *incipit*, *gnam babs kyi dar ma*, of IO370(5) ("The Dharma that came down from Heaven…", *op. cit*., pp. 219–229), but which might be better interpreted, "The Dharma that descended from the Heaven (of the spiritual-being ancestors of the Btsan-pos)" we encounter a variant of the motif of the gifts of the Dharma in a casket descending onto the roof of the palace of Lha Tho Tho Ri Gnyan Mtshan (see the *Chos 'byung* of Bu Ston), a btsan-po.

The idea of guidance from ancestral figures above, distilled in the phrase *gnam gyi ya bla dgung gi ya stengs la* at PT1134.11, "the superior government (*bla*) in heaven, in the upper levels of the sky", bears both a functional and formal resemblance to this more ancient Scythian story. The famous quote from IO751, *'O Lde Spu Rgyal gnam gyï lha las myï'ï rjer gshegs pa* also shows that the ancestral spirits in *gnam* "heaven" chose that one who came to rule the Tibetans. (More on this in Chapter Two.) In other words, these Buddhist "treasures" fell on that roof because the ancestral *lha* ordained them to.

According to Scythian mythology, golden instruments fell from heaven: a cup, an axe, and a yoke with a plough; these are believed to symbolize the heavenly ordination (by the ancestral fathers) of their ruler, the Scythian king of the warrior/king class, to rule the classes of his people and create civilization. (Herodotus as translated by Aubrey

de Sélincourt, London, 1972, p. 272; cf. also Bruce Lincoln, "On the Scythian royal burials", *Proto-Indo-European; the archaeology of a linguistic problem: studies in honor of Marija Gimbutas*, Washington, DC, 1987, pp. 267–285; cf. p. 278.) In the same way, the descent of the Dharma is a gift from heavenly ancestors (IO370(5), line 15: *pha myes* (= *yab myes*) through their representatives Srong Btsan Sgam-po and Khri Srong Lde Brtsan) which was to civilize the Tibetans by making them Buddhist (line 7, and see notes on *lha* in next chapter).

These stories deserve to be compared, because they are not common motifs in religio-political myths in Asia and because they serve the same purpose in both cultures. The Tibetan legend has the same function as the Scythian prophecy of golden implements falling from heaven which foretold their "civilizing", despite that the former contains elements from later sources, such as the *Karaṇḍavyūha*. (Some of these points have also been discussed in WALTER & BECKWITH.1997. The symbolic role of gold is further discusssed below. Note these significant motifs: Khri Srong Lde Brtsan used a golden axe or similar object to outline Bsam-yas; also, among the few motifs concerning court life and ritual that have survived, a golden cup is significant. These motifs are discussed in Chapter Three and Appendix I.)

No direct cultural transmission from Scythians to Tibetans should be inferred from these and other similarities; we are far from being able to make that assertion. Nevertheless, several articles have shown, speaking conservatively, Scythian-like artifacts in Tibet (e.g., "Skythen in Tibet?" by G.G. Koenig, in *Der Weg zum Dach der Welt*, Frankfurt am Main, 1982, pp. 318–320, and references there). The only persuasive evidence will be that which demonstrates either a Scythian ethnie as an early constituent of the peoples of the Tibetan Plateau, or, that while yet in the area of what is now Gansu or Qinghai, the precursors of the Tibetans (on which see Chapter Two, note 2) were conquered or strongly influenced by descendents or carriers of the "classical" Scythian culture of the Greek and Roman historians. Just passing through and leaving ornaments is not sufficient evidence of conquest or political interaction. (For linguistic data on possible Scythian venues in early Tibetan culture, see Chapter Two.)

(Establishing Indo-European elements in Tibetan language and culture requires a multi-faceted approach. In the next chapter, we will briefly address the likelihood that there were multiple contacts between Indo-European groups and peoples Tibetan, or who would become

Tibetan, at widely-dispersed periods of time. A range of further similarities with early Indo-European cultures is demonstrated throughout this chapter.)

This is not to say that we lack evidence of continuing contacts with cultures descended from the ancient Scythians in the area of Tibet. There is perhaps one late "Scythian" political element in Tibetan religio-political culture. In "A Scythian royal legend from ancient Uḍḍiyāna" by Martha Carter, BAI.ns6.1992.67–78, mention is made of methods to pacify *nāgarāja* to avoid drought which are strongly reminiscent of political offering rites performed by Tibetans, and later by Mongolian Buddhists.

It is significant in itself that the leadership of both cultures (Germanic peoples provide a similar example) viewed the religion and politics of their societies similarly, and used a similar cultus and mythology to express this. All these details add up to help create a context which may explain how the btsan-pos saw themselves. This, in turn, is of crucial importance for understanding how they would have interacted with Buddhism as it was presented at their courts.

Tibet's regiogony begins with the story of Gnya' Khri Btsan-po, who came down upon a mountain, then moved—actually *walked* or *rode* from there, a meaning implicit in the verb *gshegs pa* in the Rkong-po inscription—to the place where he created a center of power.[45] As with noble clans, this myth posits, at least as later interpreted, a connection between a mountain and a *lha*, or ancestral spirit. But whether this mountain location was an inherent part of the myth, or only a detail later considered important, is unclear. As distinct from many modern clan mythologies, this mountain seems never to have become the seat of a cultus. More importantly, it never became recognized as a symbol of national unity, and such should have been an important goal of such a myth. In contrast, the sacred mountains of several noble clans have long been the center of the clan's power and cultic activity, and some remain so today.[46] It is clear from both textual and anthropological study that mountains, with their spirits, are the bases for the power of the noble clans.[47] This model was not appropriate for btsan-pos because their families did not belong to a noble clan; at least none is mentioned for them, and it would have been by descendents in later documents, if not in contemporary sources (see n. 42). Also, in most sources the rulers are seen standing in alliance with some, and against, other clans. This suggests that the office of the btsan-po was outside the clan system.

(As we shall see in the next chapter, the institution of the *sku bla* might have helped harmonize the conflict inherent in this situation.)

All in all, this version of descent points to a separate origin for the office of btsan-po. Perhaps it was a later arrival which based itself on an origin-myth model already used by prominent noble clans. This is one explanation for ambivalence about the identity of what is sometimes considered their 'sacred' mountain, and even the name of the first imperial ancestor.[48] (Some core elements of the myth about Gnya' Khri Btsan-po, e.g., the sky-rope or *dmu thag* motif, are almost certainly taken from Buddhist and Hindu motifs in surrounding cultures which were meant to add specific supernatural character and status to the btsan-pos.) It seems that the final creation of a central, imperial authority was not, as formulated by Tucci long ago,[49] the result of a "conquering aristocracy". It was, rather, the result of the superimposition of a small outside group, with a leadership structure built around an inspirational warrior leader, the btsan-po,[50] on a set of tribal aristocracies brought under his often unsteady central control. (The almost constant tension between btsan-pos and the leaderships of the clans, illustrated in the *Annals* through the re-conquest of areas, illustrates this.) When this happened is not clear, although it is commonly assumed that its first expression was during the reign of Srong Btsan Sgam-po's father, who bore the revealing reign name of Gnam Ri Slon Mtshan.[51] As pointed out here, many elements of this system are traceable to Indo-European precedents throughout the Eurasian world,[52] but they are found also in the creation of the confederations of the Xiongnu, Turks, Mongols, and others.

One inference we can make about the separation signaled by this *regiogony* is that the family of the btsan-pos and the noble clans need not have subscribed to the same religious beliefs, and those of their subjects as well. Often in such confederation-based empires, the obedience of various tribes and clans to a single religion was not as important as their obedience to the leader. The sudden and unconnected descent myth of the btsan-pos freed them from many religious and social nexes. One shortcoming of this position was the lack of a mechanism by any group at court to promote harmony among the competing alliances and interest groups. Only systems of oaths bound these groups together. At least, we find no evidence of a system of offsetting values.

The noble clans

In order to understand more clearly the power relationship between the btsan-pos and noble clans, let us look at the nature of social hierarchy in the Imperium.

What did it mean, originally, that some clans were aristocratic, or noble? Did all the members of such clans share equally this special status? We do not know, for example, whether all of a particular noble *rus*, or bone (*gdung*) held the same relationship to the clan ancestor, or *lha*. (Patrimony convinces us that uxorials held inferior positions, but in practical terms this was not so.)[53] Could clan members move up and down in such a system? These are things that could have affected status within the clan, as well as clan unity at the court. These are also the characteristics of a society that would have found some expression in religious beliefs or mythological narratives. The *Chronicle*, it turns out, is more concerned with idealizing the relationship between honorable clan leaders and the btsan-pos, and providing models for their virtuous behavior, than it is in praising and giving support to the btsan-pos. The documents representing the side of the btsan-pos include the inscriptions. Oathing plays a prominent role in the systems presented in both sets of documents.[54]

What were the practical politics the noble clans practiced? This is a reasonable, even fundamental question. Again we face an absence of data. We are ignorant about how the members of noble clans were chosen for court appointments. Were they the most significant leaders, those of slightly lower level, or perhaps even an excess of potential, rival leadership that could be "spared" (i.e., removed) for court service?[55] What benefit was brought to the clans by their service? Was there a religious dimension to this service, and thus their relationship with the btsan-pos, beyond the religious dimensions of oathing? (The answer to this question must have been yes, but details lie hidden in the obscure role of the *sku bla* and other religious figures at the court.)

Rule, as expressed in a *regiogony* which also involved the leaders of noble clans at a court, was expressed in a compounded, steeply vertical system which need not have penetrated all layers of Tibetan society.[56] We see a small, intrusive group which either imposed or persuasively presented the concept of rule by btsan-po over a set of clans who were already leaders in their areas, but became further ennobled by alliance with him. All shared the bounty of their military success in accordance with their status at the court and within the clan. Through a complex

system of oaths, the sworn promise on the side of the btsan-po would have been a distribution of greater wealth and social rewards for clan leaders doing the most to contribute to the success of the military actions under the leadership of the btsan-po. No coherent religious ideology or cultus, beyond the promise of victory and the desire for more wealth and status for each clan, is necessary to explain this function of the leadership of the Tibetan Imperium. It is well here to consider the social dimensions of oathing. Because of the political nature of marriages between btsan-pos and the nobility, oathing would have been just as important an element in the relationship between the btsan-po and his male children, and it would have been formalized at court.[57]

Tibet's military successes often resulted in quick expansions—and contractions—of its empire. This meant that the alliances between btsan-pos and clans must have undergone constant torques. Clan hierarchies of the Mgar, Dba's, Myang, Mchims, Tshe-pong, Bro, Mnon, etc., would have watched as their ranks became thinly stretched, with the court requiring more and more personnel and advisors, who at first came almost exclusively from them.[58] This pressure, increasing as time and the amount of occupied area went on, was almost certainly an element in Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's decision to turn away from, or to augment this system, by relying more and more on Sanghas. It is no coincidence that this change occurred at the time the Tibetan Empire reached its greatest geographical expansion. Monks provided additional manpower and thus took some pressure off this system. This was an excellent motivation for establishing Sanghas as official representatives of the Imperium. The inherent inflexibility of local clan politics would have been another cause for the lack of development of a professional administrative class of *literati* in the Imperium, such as had developed in China long before. The Sangha would have been seen as an institution to fill that role.

Such dynamics must also have affected the politico-religious orientation of clan hierarchs to the btsan-pos. In its early period, the oft-cited annual and triennial "rites of renewal", the oath-taking rituals that bound the btsan-pos and clan leaders, provided the btsan-pos with their manpower. Change may have come quickly for this system, however, as these rites are really only mentioned early on in a Chinese source (JTS.2), in such a context that it may be an artifact of an early period of clan consolidation. Indeed, there is no indication that these rites (along with the comitatus itself, see n. 67) obtained late into the Imperium; the lengthy order in the full-text version of the Bsam-yas

edict by Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, studied in Chapter Four (see also n. 84 of this chapter), shows him turning away from these rites to a new way to solemnize political alliances. This may well have been the end of a long process, after which clan leaders oathed their submission to the court in a different way. On the other hand, the btsan-po remained a warrior-leader throughout the Imperial period, so a set of different oaths binding them with clan leaders for this purpose may have remained. (The Bsam-yas inscription shows a dual oathing system at work.)

Tibet's military culture and the comitatus

In its simplest expression, the btsan-po's military success shows both that "might makes right" and that "might makes wealth", and this is what supported the development of the highly martial society that, according to Chinese sources, Tibet was. Tibetan society was then youth- (i.e., warrior-) oriented; swords were worn even during periods of peace (JTS.3; cf. also the *Tongdian*). Families who had lost several generations in combat were especially venerated, and great value was placed on martial talents and the hierarchy that utilized them. All indications are that status and what mobility there was in this society was based on military prowess and bravery. The only mention of a spiritual being in the Tang Annals is that Tibetans worshipped a "god of war" (Yuandi), around whom there was a cult. [JTS.3; XTS.81] The entire country considered then "Tibet" was divided into districts for military and other government purposes, a situation that we know obtained throughout the Imperium.[59]

None of this, of course, is brought out in later histories of Tibet. It almost certainly was not that all martial traditions had been lost, but simply that their transmission served no function in a Buddhist context. However, it is clear that Buddhists at court had accepted a separation between "commoners" and "aristocracy", the essence of the martial structure of this society, as we show in the next chapter. Indeed, they were an integral part of this system. Acknowledging this division has been, in fact, a part of Buddhist culture in Tibet from the earliest times, and remains a defining characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism. Acceptance of social and political divisions prompted them early on to use a special vocabulary to express the special and distinct levels of their benefactors at court. It is because of this that *nearly every important politico-religious term used by the Imperium was adopted as a technical or translation*

term used by Tibetans, Indians, etc., as they rendered Buddhist doctrine and literature into Tibetan.[60]

The btsan-pos and their advisors (the *blon-po*s and others) had strong political incentives to maintain a balance of power among themselves. This set of relationships was ratified, as we have seen, by a system of oaths. Early Buddhists were not likely to have wanted to upset this, even if they might have objected to a particular rite or belief at court that was a part of this political arrangement. Swearing an oath of allegiance to the btsan-po was the way their confederation had been created, and Buddhists would not have attacked such a central institution, although by the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan it seems to have undergone some modification.

Oathing worked on a number of levels. Some leaders of noble clans joined themselves intimately to the btsan-po in this life and beyond by becoming members of his *comitatus*, described below. This was the highest degree of affiliation and created the core set of alliances. We cited above a number of terms and phrases which indicate various sorts of oathing, the distinct meanings of which are not now understood. Oath-taking as political process is best exampled, dramatically but perhaps historically, in the fourth chapter of the *Chronicle* as the manner by which Gnam Ri Slon Mtshan created the prototypical confederation to support him and the creation of his army as their btsan-po.[61]

Since this was the method by which fealty was maintained at the highest levels, other sorts were used to create the loyalty of lower-level functionaries who daily maintained the Imperium. The value Tibetans placed on such oath-taking was paralleled by its important role in concluding peace treaties with the Chinese (see n. 23). Buddhist monks participated in such rites. Peace-treaty rites and oathing are the most frequently mentioned religious acts in the Tang historical records on Tibet, partly, of course, because they documented asserted Tibetan violations of same.

Some historical observations about the *comitatus* may help us understand this system better. In ancient and mediaeval Eurasia rulers were almost always protected and served by a special group of warrior-companions who protected their lord at all costs. They were traditionally even closer to the ruler than his family members. (This is not hard to understand, given political alliance by marriage. For btsan-pos, this would have been a way to reinforce the loyalty of clans which became related to them by marriage. The *zhang blon* system was no guarantee of loyalty.)

The comitatus or "guard corps" system was characteristic of early Indo-European societies,[62] and it seems to have passed in an unbroken tradition through them to Turkic, Mongolian and other Central Eurasian courts.[63] The Indo-Europeans who spread through Eurasia by virtue of military aggressiveness and superior technology, including chariot warfare, seem all to have possessed this sort of organization. On the basis of this, a hypothesis may be made about broad patterns of military and social organization in early Asia.[64] The Scythians and Germanic peoples could have early spread this system, and the Tibetans—improbably, it may seem, from the point of view of *modern* geography—came to share this and other characteristics of their political cultures. A common feature all these peoples shared was that they were multi-ethnic confederations. This shaped their society, and, thus, their politico-religious beliefs.[65]

The only significant sources we have for the study of the Tibetan comitatus are the official Old and New Tang historical records. (The fact that we possess no detailed account of this important institution in emic sources is evidence of just how much was lost between the Imperial Period and the later construction of Tibetan society.)

Those Chinese sources tell us that the btsan-po's comitatus lived with him in large felt tents which could hold several hundred people.[66] This "guard corps" was called in Chinese *gong ming* [共命] or "ones who shared a common fate". [JTS.3 and XTS.80–81] There were at least two terms in Tibetan for *comitati*, apparently designating different degrees of closeness to the btsan-po: *dku*[67] alone and *dku rgyal*.[68] Their earliest attested use is in the Lha-sa Zhol inscription, which is dedicated to describing the inclusion of Stag Sgra Klu Khong in the "inner" or higher-degree comitatus as a *dku rgyal*, and the special rewards for his descendents that he won through his loyalty to Khri Srong Lde Brtsan. [RICHARDSON.H.1985.16]

According to the CHRONICLE.106, the original comitatus was drawn from six clans whose leaders allied with Gnam Ri Slon Mtshan. This description agrees with the number (five or six) of companions who attach themselves to a lord to form a comitatus as described for the Tibetans at XTS.81. In the narrative in the *Chronicle* they took an oath (*mna' bor*) to support him in his conquest of the area controlled (*srid*) by Zing-po Rje. Immediately following this conquest, various clan groupings—and families within them—came to him, were formally attached to his *dku rgyal*, and this comitatus core group formed

the nucleus of the btsan-po's guard in the formation of the Tibetan Imperium.

The customs described at XTS.81f show us how this system might have related to religious belief. The comitatus would have had as a reward for its loyalty a continuation of the services of their clans to the btsan-po, and status at his court, after death.[69] This would have allowed them to maintain a status in the afterlife beneficial to their descendants. This only makes sense if they believed that such leaders maintained some control over the welfare and status of their clan after death.[70] (The same belief applied to the btsan-pos and the Imperium as a whole.) They committed suicide to be buried with Gnam Ri Slon Btsan when he died, they were interred close to him, and then the area was covered over with a tumulus on which trees were planted, and upon which sacrifices would be made in the future. [JTS.3]

Close similarities exist not only with the Scythians, as already discussed in note 69, but with the far-away Merovingians, reflecting a Germanic connection with the spirit of early medieval Eurasian society in general. Childeric, one of their first kings, died in 482. His burial site was uncovered first in 1653, but later research has clarified its structure in a disturbed urban environment.[71]

Childeric was buried in a tumulus with his horse's head, his weapons and wealth, symbolic both of his status and warrior function. Significantly, the bones of twenty-one horses in three groups were found at the circumference of the tumulus. These would have been either his own horses—those he rode—or those of his comitatus, accompanying him to his "heavenly" court to protect their lord and share its wealth. The latter is more likely, since the head in his tomb has usually been assumed to be that of his own horse.[72] Skeletons of horses have been found around some Scythian *kurgan*s (tumuli) in the Steppes of Central Asia.

Wherever it is found, the fundamental incentive for *comitati* is basic economics. An original, small group throws its lot in, for life or death, with a charismatic leader, in order to benefit itself and its families and clans, whom they had been chosen to represent, now and in the hereafter. (We certainly understand better the economic and social bases of this system than its religious underpinnings or rationales.) As the amount of wealth divided after battle increased, fame developed, and participating in this system became more attractive. It eventually became a self-propagating mechanism: As the Imperium grew, more and

more would undertake to become part of that body by being oathed to a btsan-po or powerful lord, and then behaving exceptionally in their service and protection to earn more rewards.[73] Although this provided a stable core of military manpower, it would eventually become an economic strain, because the pressure to conquer to keep providing for the loyalty of an increasing number of warriors meant that the leaders had to engage in more and more military activity to expand trade routes and thus increase tax/tribute, something obvious in Tibetan historical sources.[74] When, on the other hand, Khri Srong Lde Brtsan began the process of relying more and more on Sanghas for government service, personnel would have been freed up for active service and occupation. This would have provided some relief from the pressure of providing greater wealth for division (we do not know whether monks were allowed in this system, although we know some were active fighters). We do not know if this system obtained through the Imperium; there seems to have been little motivation for abandoning it entirely, since the definition of "btsan-po", up to and including Ral-pa-can, remained primarily that of an inspired warrior-leader.

We also have no data about how the comitati and Buddhist monks might have gotten along, and later Buddhist historiography seems altogether ignorant of the institution of the *comitatus*. We could suppose rivalry, conflict and the creation of fixed and opposed positions by groups at the court that might have had different religious views, but we must keep in mind that both monks and the members of the comitati came from the same noble clans. Ultimately, we are left with only a few terms, such as *dku rgyal, lha*, and *sku bla*, upon which to reconstruct the religious dimensions of politics at the Tibetan court.[75]

The Tibetan court in context

Tibet's earliest religious beliefs and practices developed in the context of its society. Because of scarce emic sources, we must have recourse, cautiously, to other early Central Eurasian empires to examine what processes might have been at work within it. Unfortunately, the most commonly received traditions we have about them need to be discarded so we can view all these societies in a more objective manner. The first thing we need to do is re-learn about the nature of these societies, and this should begin with our most fundamental assumption, that of the category "pastoral nomadism". Because of the topography in which it

operated, Tibet's was not a "pastoral nomadic" society in the classical sense, at least throughout—and herein lies the difficulty with this category. "Pastoral nomad" evokes the idea of societies on the hoof, mobile peoples raiding and then disappearing into the Steppe, dependent on the food and riches of sedentary peoples on whom they prey. This received tradition about such peoples has been mostly extrapolated simplistically from historical works, especially those of Chinese and Persian writers. These reports paint a people with childish motives, materially deprived, who search either for easy gain from, or the attention of, "sedentary" neighbors with their great civilizations. The Tibetans have not escaped such simplistic and incorrect characterization. The first great topos projected onto them has to do with Srong Btsan Sgam-po's campaigns on the Chinese border, where he is depicted as motivated by a desire for a Chinese wife—i.e., acknowledgement by the Emperor. The idea that he recognized the value of China as a trading partner, and was interested in using military power to expand trade, actually doesn't seem to have been understood by Chinese chroniclers. One characteristic which unites Scythian, Xiongnu, Turkic, Tibetan and Mongolian polities is that they recognized the long-term value of trade because it was their principal source of revenue. This, in turn, occasionally brought them into conflict with China and other nations for control of the cities through which trade flowed. Thus, the military history of the Tibetan Imperium is largely a matter of campaigns to control the important cities of Xinjiang, from which resources in tax on trade, and tribute, could fund, *inter alia*, the continued support of the various comitati which held the Imperium together.

When we examine the history of Central Eurasia in detail, using "pastoral nomadism" to explain cultures and religions loses its value. This becomes clear when we encounter a culture such as ancient Tibet, which otherwise shared many fundamental similarities with so-called "nomads" such as the Turks and Mongols. The category "pastoral nomad", it seems, was created through an obsession with only one very visible aspect of their cultures, and it has not served the studies of these peoples and their religions well.

Let us discuss cities in this context. As far as we know, all of these peoples had a complex, intelligent inter-relationship among the parts of their population and their environment. They had to have, because their environment was not forgiving. The Scythians, despite the received tradition based on Herodotus, actually had a balanced society, with many cities (ironically, Herodotus describes their cities well!); only a

portion of their population was "nomadic".[76] When Chingis Khan came to power, the first thing this "nomad" conqueror did was order the construction of a dozen cities to facilitate trade, as well as to serve as bases for military outfitting and organization.[77] Cities, built or occupied, had multiple functions: Storage of food, the production of weapons, housing for troops with them, and, especially, as entrepots (caravanserai). Tibet's preoccupation with controlling Dunhuang, Miran, Khotan, etc., follows this model, and for the same reason: As with other central Eurasian peoples, they were traders or understood the economic value of trade routes, and sought cities to maximize their wealth *not* primarily through conquering them for plunder, but through using them to create secure routes which could increase trade. The larger the empire, the more necessary were longer and more secure trade routes. Since this was the most stable means by which imperial governments would enjoy increased revenues to support comitati, etc., militaries were especially important to defend them. The idea that all Central Eurasian empires were driven to expand either by necessity (because their environment was unable to support them) or out of overwhelming envy of the wealth of the sedentary nations around them (China being always prominent in this calculation) remains a dominant *topos* in both popular and, unfortunately, much scholarly effort.[78] Learning what precisely motivated these empires will help us grasp more clearly the role of religion at their courts, because it will help reveal the basic orientations and values of their cultures.

Tang sources on Tibet show a similarly diversified society which understood the function of urban sites. While many ordinary subjects lived in walled cities, the nobility and military leadership, with the btsan-po, lived in felt tents near them; the army corps and lesser officials lived, in turn, in tents around them. [JTS.3; XTS.80] This arrangement was necessary because only in fixed settlements could the fine armor of the Tibetans and their other weaponry have been manufactured and stored. [XTS.81] Tibet produced such fine armor that it was exported, and in such amounts that it had to have been produced to standards best maintained in fixed locations where techniques could most easily be standardized and quality controlled.

If cities provided such resources, why live in tents? There were advantages to keeping your court and army behind walls, as developed soon in Europe. However, all the way through Khitan and Mongol times, courts and armies were generally located just outside city walls. Were the Tibetans copying the custom of the Uyghurs and other Steppe

peoples? Was it a sign that the leadership of Tibet was keeping its distance from the populace as a whole? Or, was it an example of "military preparedness" of the time? It could be that such an arrangement made the best use of a diversified populace—something the Scythians had found out long before—and this, in turn, may have been necessary in a vast area where population densities were otherwise too small to permit the quick regimentation of a large number of the populace. We also see in Tibet what could be considered a classical Indo-European division, *à la* Dumézil: Some urban population was centered on trading and manufacturing, some involved in food raising, and some—the noble military leaders and political leadership—were mobile. There were seasonal, mobile courts or *pho brang* from the earliest entries in the *Annals* on—a nearly universal custom in Central Eurasia. From Chinese sources we learn that a sizable military force accompanied them, turning what might have been simply an administrative exercise into a military presence. (This expense and effort suggests resistance among the constituents of these confederations that required the occasional royal presence. Again, references in the *Annals* to frequent insurrections support this.) In addition, such a large force, and the need to support the court in a royal manner, would quickly exhaust an area of resources, requiring that the court move on in a timely manner.

Concerning the *pho brang*s themselves: Can we learn anything from their descriptions in old documents that might help us understand the religio-political inclination of the btsan-pos? Again, *faut de mieux* in terms of evidence, such data requires our attention.

The only believable, nearly contemporary description of a Tibetan court is that given for the last "successful" emperor, Ral-pa-can, at XTS.130f. This is a description of his summer *pho brang* in the Bal-po Valley to the north of the Gtsang-po River. An abridged rendering: [The court] was surrounded by a palisade of interconnected posts. It had three entrances, one hundred paces from each other. They were guarded by armored soldiers. Inside, "sorcerers" (*wu*) with bird hats and tiger(-skin) belts were striking drums…In the middle of the camp, there was an elevated terrace, surrounded by a balustrade. The btsan-po was seated in his tent [there]. There were [figures of] dragons with and without horns, tigers, and panthers, all made of gold. The btsan-po was dressed in white fleece, with knotted rose muslin as a head covering. He carried a gold-encrusted sword. Before him, to his right, was a Buddhist priest. The ministers of state were ranged around the foot of the terrace.[79]

In both emic and etic descriptions of the courts of the btsan-pos, reference is frequently made to gold. It was clearly a prestige substance there as opposed to the later, well-known Tibetan preferences for turquoise, *phra men*, and silver, and was a favorite substance for gifts designed to impress, several of which are recorded in the Tang historical records. However, it also seems, from long before, to have been something else widespread in Central Eurasia: A visible sign of the ruler as a war-leader possessed of wealth, one who dispenses the largess of conquests. Thus, the btsan-po's tent was either completely gold colored, or had a gold-colored tip.[80] When one considers the religious significance of the color of gold in Buddhism and among the Scythians and other peoples, such an overwhelming presence at courts calls for a separate study.[81]

As we understand better the special character of the Imperium and its religio-political setting, we also see more clearly how Buddhism must have fit in there. From this viewpoint, it is clear that we need to consider Buddhism at this time and in this environment on its own terms. There is a great cultural distance between at least the *court* of the Imperium, if not large sections of that society, and what we see in Tibetan civilization even shortly after its fall. This distinction has not been presented sufficiently in the standard surveys of Tibetan culture.[82] As a consequence, there has been little balancing of the clichéed views of the many later *chos 'byung*, both inside and outside Tibet, concerning the nature of the btsan-pos, their attitudes toward Sanghas and Buddhism at their courts, and the attitude of the Imperium toward Buddhism and religion in general. Over time, these emic stereotypes became the source of a malleable tradition which served the interests of many Tibetan groups. It is difficult today to determine when any real knowledge of that early history passed into the realm of imagination and discourse became creative, free of interest in what actually might have taken place.[83] Fortunately for us, fragments of tradition about ritual and political religion from that time have survived, in the form of special vocabulary, beliefs and practices. Some of these are the subjects of the following chapters.

Once we establish the greater context of Tibet's "feudal system" among Scythian, Germanic, and other early Central Eurasian cultures, we understand early Tibet better, but we can also understand better how it came to be forgotten so quickly. A highly vertical, imperial ideology representing some small group—perhaps even only the ruling family

and its close supporters—is vulnerable to being abandoned quickly, because when those few individuals fail to provide leadership, there is no broader set of institutions in place to maintain it. The society then becomes headless and must look for a political structure to replace it. Although we know very little about the cultures of the constituent clans of the Imperium, we may assume that they had *not* abandoned local political traditions (loyalty to the btsan-pos not requiring this), and quickly returned to them when the Imperium failed to reward and protect them, i.e., failed to honor the oaths around which it had been constructed in the first place. Indeed, the *Chronicle*, perhaps not inadvertently, provides a model for this in the various ways it shows fidelity to oaths and noble behavior.

How does this help us understand the place of Buddhist Sanghas at Tibetan courts? First, a general observation: Ethnies in confederacies (especially clear examples being the Turks and Mongols) thrived when they overlooked differences of culture and religion in order to pursue goals of common interest. Tibetan society strove for this same unity, and although the btsan-pos, as the *qan*s and *qaghan*s, had their own interests and priorities concerning religion at their courts, none of these peoples pursued the goal of supporting or establishing one religion above others. (When the Uyghur leadership followed Manichaeism, although also not an exclusive choice, this distanced them fatally from their subjects, and this episode remains the one prominent exception to this tradition.) It doesn't seem that Khri Srong Lde Brtsan was rejecting this approach when he expanded the role of Buddhism in his administration. Although some Zhang Blons resisted even this (examples at DPA'-BO.1985.370,373), that they did so because they favored some other religion seems an oversimplification or exaggeration; at least there is no contemporaneous data to support it. Lack of unity at court is not likely to have come simply from the presence of Buddhist monks; this is especially so when we consider that these monks were from noble families as well. Rather, disaffection most likely arose over some specific changes in protocol and interdictions that would have been perceived to have a great impact on the successful military and political function of the Imperium. We discussed above the probability that changes in oathing by themselves could have caused divisions in the ranks of the advisors (n. 22). Khri Srong Lde Brtsan himself tells us that he met with Buddhist advisors, heard their teachings, received writings from them, and then boxed them for distribution to propagate the Buddhadharma. Then, he charged as unfit or harmful several rites that were not in accord

with Buddhism, with the exception of the old Tibetan *chos*, and the politically crucial *sku bla gsol ba* (q.v. the next chapter).[84] From this it is clear that Khri Srong Lde Brtsan attacked some political rites—but not those most important—as part of his embrace of Buddhism. Thus, we have no clear evidence that the expansion of Buddhism at the court *by itself* would have threatened the interests of most clans. More than anything else, changes in the oathing system would have greatly antagonized those who believed in its efficacy, because it affected their connection with the btsan-po, the root of this system. In fact, there is little or no evidence that the religious dimensions of oathing would have needed to change, as evidenced by the flexibility involving treaty rites. One good guess we can make here is that, as animal sacrifice came to be frowned upon by some Buddhists at court, those who still practiced it to seal oathings feared that the ancestral spiritual beings (*lha*) who witnessed them would be offended by such a change. We will return to this point.

Why should some advisors who disagreed with Khri Srong Lde Brstan's religious policies not have deserted him? The answer lies, again, in the oathing system. Having sworn to support their btsan-po, many in the government who disagreed with his actions nevertheless would have felt it disloyal to turn against him. These would have included, certainly, some advisors who are listed in his several edicts as (perhaps neutral) witnesses to his decisions supporting Buddhism. We should also not assume that all the advisors supporting Buddhism necessarily agreed with other policies and actions of the emperor. The political situation was certainly complicated, and we remain far from possessing a clear understanding of it.

Conclusions

The dynamic between monks of noble families and the btsan-pos emerges as our best, and earliest evidence (e.g., the edict for Myang Ting-nge 'Dzin) for the way Buddhism was integrated into the Imperium. The hierarchy of that time created the only model Tibetan society has had for embedding Buddhism within it. Although the office of btsan-po disappeared—perhaps, as suggested here, because it remained an intrusive presence in a clan-oriented society—the noble families that survived, as well as those created since, enjoy a status in Tibetan Buddhist traditions on this basis, and it is one of its defining charac-

teristics. The other defining characteristic of this religion, that which caused it to be called "Lamaism" at one time, is closely connected with such a hierarchical tradition. How it grew out of this period is analyzed in Chapters Two and Four.

Methodological observations

To understand Tibet's early politico-religious situation, we have had recourse to diverse cultures with which it had, in some cases, remarkably similar characteristics. This amounts to argument by analogy, generally considered to be a weak method for analysis and reconstruction. Nevertheless, the details which emerge from this comparison are so similar that they deserve our best efforts at interpretation. Pursuing characteristics of religious life which occur in conjunction with analogous political and social structures moves us, if imperfectly, from analogy to participation in a larger set of phenomena through inductive reasoning. Other reasons to accept the closeness of these cultures will be brought forward in this work, but for now we can say that the hypothesis of a Central Eurasian Culture Complex (n. 63) is well formulated and gives us a working context to explain much about the Imperium which is found in the Tang historical records and Old Tibetan sources.

However, we face the same problem as earlier studies when it comes to evaluating political symbolism as a carrier of real religious values for a culture. We can identify beliefs, deities, and rituals in the confederations of the early Germans, Scythians, Tibetans, Turks, and Mongols, but in few instances can we make a harmonious whole from them. Such a concept might be incongruous in the context of a confederation. Religious studies in Central Eurasia have so far been inadequate to develop an investigative methodology which can identify and evaluate the importance of "native" (or: nativized) religious ideology from those elements that have clearly been borrowed, either because of propinquity or for prestige value. Research into the relationship between religious and political belief is even less developed. One gets the feeling that there is some unease at lowering the study of religion to include its relationship with politics in traditional religious studies.

Studying the spread of politico-religious beliefs in an early period raises another problem. How many of the above motifs were important and meaningful—really "faithed" by Tibetans—and how many

represented superficial adaptations, the formal borrowing of areal motifs, what we might call 'keeping up with the Joneses'? For example, we know that both a btsan-po (at least one, Ral-pa-can) and (at least one) Uyghur Qaghan governed from a golden tent on a raised dais. Does this mean that religio-political values from one culture actually influenced beliefs about leadership in the other? Were they continuing a shared ancient tradition that was central to their political life? Or, was it mostly just for show?

Endnotes

[1] "Imperium" is meant here both in strict and extended senses. In its strict sense it is used as a technical term for a level of authority within Roman government, in which consuls and praetors held "Imperium", the right to command the military. We have evidence that generals and advisors to the btsan-pos occasionally did that. *In extenso*, the concept reflects the authority of the btsan-po and the indivisibility of his office from the physical domain ruled by Tibet under his leadership, which is also consistent with Roman usage. One example: Generals, far from Lhasa, carried out local peace negotiations with their Chinese counterparts as conditions required.

How this over-arching concept was worked out in practical internal politics and religion within a quickly growing, multi-ethnic empire is fundamental to understanding both Buddhism in early Tibet and how it developed the unique character it still has today.

[2] The service of a Buddhist Sangha to the Imperium actually helps explain why literacy would at first have been restricted to monks and functionaries whose writing abilities were valued by the Imperium. When we note that it seems obvious that Buddhist literature would have been under the same control as state documents, this conclusion logically follows from the fact that any group capable of creating and reproducing written materials might easily become a tool of enemies or divisive elements within the Imperium. That no documents adversarial to the Imperium have survived suggests that there existed a successful vetting process to prevent this. Early sources of the medieval Türk, Uyghur, and Mongol empires are similarly homogeneous in this regard.

The Old Tibetan inscriptions are our earliest datable monuments of Tibetan writing, and they are clear examples of the principal point made in Kelly's article cited above, that writing in most cultures first served administrative communication. There remains the question, in the case of Tibet: Who, precisely, was the audience? The Imperium had an extremely vertical hierarchy, with titles abounding in Old Tibetan documents to indicate relative rank at court. Perhaps only entitled officers and military leaders needed access to its written documents. However, in fact, monks are the only identifiable group in the Imperium who were both present at courts and engaged in literate activities. Since most, perhaps all, of these monks came from noble families, official documents were an important venue for their participation in the unity of power (and authority) of the btsan-pos. We have no evidence that it was even a good idea for "ordinary citizens" to understand them, and no idea how many of them could.

If we consider the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet from this point of view, we see the value of examining texts listed in early catalogs of translations (the *Pho-brang Ldan/Lhan Dkar-ma*, the *Pho-brang 'Pang-thang-ma*, and the *Pho-brang Mchims-phu-ma*, the first thought to have been composed *ca.* 824) for their potential political usefulness as well as for their doctrinal contents.

This scenario also explains why, as attested in their colophons, even many "non-Buddhist" works were composed, in fact, by Buddhists. This has implications above all for the debate on the existence and place of the Bon and other religious traditions in the Imperium. This, of course, also helps explain why we know so little about other religious practitioners who came to or served at its courts.

[3] These comments are constrained by our ignorance of the degree of literacy in the Imperium at any time, but especially before Buddhism became widespread. Since we possess no texts that can certifiably be dated before the reigns of btsan-pos who supported Buddhism, and thus might have employed Sanghas, separating Buddhist activity in Tibet from the origin of writing and scribal activity at court is an impossible task.

The interesting parallel between the development of Sanghas in Tibet and monastic traditions in Europe is deserving of more study. How rewarding this would be is clear as we investigate here how the Imperium and Sanghas functioned together via the oathing system, and how the noble families and clans interacted with their societies.

For some specific examples of noble monks, see n. 39.

[4] We note here with interest—because of its political implications, including the creation of the inscriptions—the position J. Filliozat has put forward, that the Tibetan script is closest to that in late 7th century Gupta inscription from Gopālpur, on which see the quote in C. Scherrer-Schaub and G. Bonani, "Establishing a typology of the old Tibetan manuscripts: a multidisciplinary approach", *Dunhuang manuscript forgeries* (London: British Library, 2002), esp. p. 196. Varieties of writings came quickly, perhaps evidence of a constant eye to developments in India, which is interesting in itself; cf. this article, n. 35, for evidence of Śārāda influence in the ninth century. Nothing is yet certain about the origin of the Tibetan script, however, and for other views see H. Hoffmann, *Tibet: a handbook* (Bloomington, IN: Research Center for the Language Sciences, Indiana University), p. 16 and 18 (bibliography).

Whether Thon (AKA 'Thon or Mthon) Mi Sambhoṭa of the narratives was a historical figure, it is at least quite doubtful that he was the author of the treatises attributed to him (see R.A. Miller, "Thon mi Sambhoṭa and his grammatical treatises reconsidered", *Contributions on Tibetan language, history and culture*. Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 1983, vol. 1, pp. 183–205; see esp. pp. 183–205). That he was the "originator" of the Tibetan script is also less than likely, because, again, we cannot overlook the fact that literacy and Buddhism were nearly coeval in many Asian cultures. (There is good evidence that monks with an education in Indian grammar were in control of the treatises attributed to him; on this see N. Simonsson, "Reflections on the grammatical tradition in Tibet and its connection with Indian Buddhistic speculation on language", *Indologica taurinensia*.12.1984.185–190.) This revolution in the primary use of written Tibetan helps us understand the difference between the language of, e.g., the *Annals* and that of Buddhist texts from later in the Imperium. The bases for what we know today as "Classical Tibetan" were laid in a unique synergy between Sanghas with monasteries of literate monks and levels of government bureaucracy, attributed to have taken place during the reigns of Sad-na Legs and Ral-pa-can. (Although the process may have begun earlier. Comparing orthography from the earliest inscriptions on shows a remarkable stability of written forms.)

The kernel of Thon Mi's story *could* represent the career of an important government figure, one who worked with members of the Sangha and the government to standardize Tibet's new script. On the other hand, he could be completely fictional, a creation of both secularist and Buddhist chroniclers otherwise unable to explain how a writing system and literacy came to early Tibet.

There are some serious historiographical implications from jumping to the conclusion that this story is merely a pious fiction meant to glorify Srong Btsan Sgam-po as Tibet's "culture bringer". This modernist interpretation may be questioned, if only because these narratives also contained, in changed but not unexpected forms, the names of many other figures at Srong Btsan Sgam-pos' court known in Old Tibetan sources.

(See G. Uray, *op. cit.* below, p. 32ff) Likewise, G. Uray's scepticism about the role of Buddhism at the court of Mes Ag Tshoms (*op. cit.* below, p. 48), based on an earlier statement by Haarh (q.v.), is even less than an *argumentum ex silencio*, since we do have early authorities crediting him with building temples; Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, in his *chos 'byung*, in fact (DPA'-BO.1985.373), connects his father's building of Kwa Chu Gtsug-lag-khang with a "revolt of the *zhang blon*". (This was the event caused by the presence of the Khotanese monks in Tibet. On the *zhang blon* see DPA'-BO.2000.29n.) This means that it almost certainly was not insignificant support, even though, not surprisingly, it has not survived in a great deal of paper documentation.

Uray's scepticism is also based, as are some other analyses of the history of Buddhism in Tibet, on a naïve faith in the paper trail. The earlier period of Tibetan history will always need others to speak for it; some documents may have been produced and Buddhism even have flourished, but all is washed away by later documentation which—by its very existence—seems to call into question what it itself often says about earlier times. Ironically, this same modern "critical" scholarship has no problem also dismissing the accounts of the Imperial era in Phyi dar period *chos 'byung* as fabrications. Recently, however, it has been said: "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence." So, do we deny the accounts of greater antiquity in both ancient and modern documents simply because we must only have a thriving Buddhism in Tibet during and after Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's reign, even though he mentions in his own documents that Buddhism was practiced even as far back as the reign of Srong Btsan Sgam-po? Would not those reading Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's documents surrounding the Bsam-yas edict during his life have questioned his presentation of Buddhism in Tibet if it did not, in fact, accord with reality?

The variant spellings, lacunae, etc., found in much later collated stories about Srong Btsan Sgam-po—which agree with early and genuinely Old Tibetan sources—actually support the argument that some information about his court survived into the Phyi Dar. Uray's historical chronology for some of these motifs may be correct (*op. cit.* below, p. 49), and even his reasons for this chronology, but in a general way, they speak neither for nor against the historical record in other similarly old documents. On these points see especially G. Uray, "The narrative of legislation and organization of the Mkhas-pa'i dga'-ston", AOH.26.1.1–68, esp. pp. 57–58, and C. Vogel, *Thon-mi Sambho-ṭa's mission to India and Sroṅ-btsan sgam-po's legislation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981). (Fortunately, study of non-literary evidence for Buddhism as early as Srong Btsan Sgam-po's reign continues to develop; references to archaeological research are found in this work.)

To understand how the development of Buddhism related to the spread of documentation in Tibet during Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's reign, outside of merely copying Buddhist Sutras, we must appreciate that the Imperium reached its greatest extent—and wealth—during his reign. This would have been accompanied by an increase in literate manpower, individuals serving the Imperium capable of reading, copying and explaining official documents. Although literacy is demonstrated by figures from many levels of the government in the sources cited above (e.g., OTMET), we have not identified any one group responsible for higher-level communications. The value of the literacy of monks would have been obvious, for reasons discussed in note three, above. Monks also provided Khri Srong Lde Brtsan with more control over the male population of nobility who served him, since they now owed at least some loyalty to a Buddhist structure he was supporting. The literate among them could also have functioned as intermediaries between the btsan-pos and their far-flung tribal homelands, carrying and reading copies of inscriptions, etc. (We know that multiple copies of inscriptions were made, but not the purpose all of them were to serve, beyond being archived. Khri Srong tells us that he had some thirteen copies of the lengthy, paper version of the Bsam-yas inscription made to be dispatched to Bru Sha, Zhang Zhung, and other regions. [DPA'-BO.1985.372] Who better to read and interpret them than monks?)

Again, there are good reasons to reject the assumption, which one can frequently read in scholarship, that when the btsan-pos before Khri Srong Lde Brtsan erected *gtsug lag khang*, this was a trivial demonstration of support. In fact, investing in temples and monasteries involved the re-direction of the economy and society of the Imperium, and thus immediately met with stiff resistence. Members of the btsan-po's comitatus could have been upset with this appropriation of resources that could have gone to them. More than a superficial motivation on the part of the btsan-po would have been required. Mes Ag Tshoms built Kwa Chu, mentioned above and described at R. Vitali, *Early temples of Central Tibet*, pp. 1–35, to support Khotanese monks. They also required constant support, and, in return for that support, they would have provided services to Mes Ag Tshoms. This is what occasioned the "revolt of the Zhang Blon" mentioned above.

[5] This uncertainty is a constant in the search for other "original" religions throughout Eurasia. The Turkic, Mongolian, and Scythian confederacies were all multi-ethnic, polylingual entities exposed to an immense number of religious beliefs and practices within themselves and as they encountered other peoples. Even determining *whether* there was a religious system peculiar to each of them may be impossible to do (read Gardīzī's description of the customs of various Turkic groups). To come closer to some of our homes and hearths, the search for the "original" Germanic religion is also a romantic adventure: "…a period of 'pure' Germanic heathendom existed in theory alone because we may assume that at least to some extent even the North Germanic tribes came into contact with some form of Christianity probably as early as the late Roman Iron Age…Even in Scandinavia, Migration Age movements as well as established trade links (many of them going back to the Bronze Age) preceded the early Viking period, which brought larger numbers of Scandinavians into direct contact with the manifestations of the Christian church." (*Early Germanic literature and culture*, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2004, p. 95).

Buddhist cultures surrounded Tibet, and—by trade—certainly penetrated it at an early date. Rather than one or two principal early encounters of Tibet with Buddhism, we should imagine numerous influences and groups, some of whom were geographically limited or minor in other ways, and were perhaps forgotten already by the end of the Imperium. Others, such as the Khotanese monks, maintained establishments for some time in Tibet during the Imperium, and their long-range influence is unknown to us.

Practically, this is also what lies at the core of our uncertainty about the relationship of 'Bon' to 'Buddhism'. For example, there may have been some figures at court, otherwise Buddhist, who made themselves specialists in burial rites for btsan-pos. Although not a separate tradition, it may not have been recognized as a form of Buddhism by Phyi Dar traditions. (Who were, after all, attempting to follow concepts of correct practice which were originally—and deliberately—of 'foreign' origin.) In fact, some Buddhist lamas and monks have always routinely performed non-normative Buddhist rites, and perhaps performed such rites for the benefit of btsan-pos. Nevertheless, some such ritual actions came to be assigned in later times to the 'Bon' tradition. All views of fixed positions and animosity about such topics come from later agendas and mindsets. Among other things, these categories were meant to address the question, "What happened to our great empire?", and the Buddhists among them seem never to have been cognizant that their support for the Imperium might actually have had something to do with it. Better to create a straw man, flammable by rhetoric.

[6] I refer here to texts which explicitly tell us about the role of the Sangha in creating and maintaining the court's religious ethos. Without materials such as these, we are not in a position to fully understand or appreciate the texts dealt with by A. MacDonald ("Une lecture…") in the Lalou Festschrift. Remember, these texts were almost certainly *scribed* by monks from the nobility. Did they also have a hand in composing them?

As is often the case, we benefit by comparing the Tibetan empire with the Mongolian. On the basis of current data, there seems to have been no over-arching Mongol religio-political ideology beyond belief in the leadership of Heaven (*Tengri*). Beyond the charismatic personality of Chingis, we are at a loss to find ideas that supported or unified their empire. With the portioning of his empire at his death, a Buddhist, "mandalaic" orientation (the Altan Ordu, etc.) appears as an integrating principle, but this is not explicitly articulated as such, and disputes soon arose after its traditional division to his sons. In other words, 'Heaven' as a uniting principle barely succeeded his rule. To this day, in Mongolia Chingis Qan is celebrated for his supernatural qualities of leadership and power, not for his position within any political or religious system external to him. It would seem that this sort of charismatic leadership was also characteristic of the btsan-pos.

[7] The Old Turkic and Old Tibetan inscriptions, nearly contemporary but dissimilar in some ways, provide religious and mythological data about tribal leaders. In neither case are there clear links between them and their subjects. Much, certainly, was known or assumed by those who could read these documents in their time, but the mechanisms which propelled these systems are not articulated. At least one of the reasons this was done was for security, as we will see.

[8] We refer here to the famous "conversion" of the Uyghur leadership to Manichaeism in 761. This disastrous choice at least showed that the leader of this confederation—Bügü Qan—had grown estranged from his power-base, its citizens. However, perhaps the choice of this—or any—organized, international religion by itself was enough to disunite the Uyghur Empire, and for the same reasons that Buddhism weakened the Tibetan: The oath-taking system on which the socio-political structure of the Uyghur tribal confederation was based was seen to have been abandoned by him. When a disastrous change in climate caused various hardships (n. 30), their society became disunited and was unable to withstand assault. (On the date of Bügü Khan's conversion and and a few details on the opposition to Manichaean Electi by officials under him in contemporary documents, the Tarkhans, see Larry V. Clark, "The conversion of Bügü Khan to Manichaeism". *Studia Manichaica*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000, pp. 83–123.)

[9] Perhaps the most representative, anecdotal evidence for this is in the report of Marco Polo. In his work, Qubilai Qan maintains respect and support for the four great "prophets", Buddha, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, whose teachings he supports in his empire. It is even put into his mouth that he worships the "gods" of all these traditions, "so that I may be sure of doing it to him who is greatest in heaven and truest; and to him I pray for aid". [Latham, *Travels of Marco Polo*. London: Penguin Books, 1992, p. 119.] In practical terms, this meant having Buddhist monks (in particular, the so-called *baġci*) perform auguries and astrological calculations, both at courts and at the head of armies preparing for battle, to ensure success. (Latham, *op. cit*., p. 115; cf. *The travels of Marco Polo* as rendered by L.F. Benedetto and englished by A. Ricci, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 99–101. On the *baġci* as a Tantric Buddhist practitioner, see Emel Esin, "The Turkish Baḳšı and the painter Muhammad Siyāh Ḳalam". AOH.32.1979.81–114; cf. especially pp. 83ff and 90ff. William of Rubruck says much the same thing.)

There is no evidence *against* such a practical and catholic attitude, and much evidence for it. The Mongols did not meet these traditions simultaneously (they had much prior, intimate experience with Nestorian Christians, for example). We must assume that each was received at court and, upon vowing not to hinder (and most likely to support) their conquests and government, were welcomed as useful resources for both future expansion and the pacification of peoples following these traditions already within their boundaries. In another famous anecdotal source, Chingis Qan is said to have respected Taoist and Buddhist masters, again, because they could "talk to Heaven", meaning, they had the practical value of being able to intermediate between himself

and the power that he believed supported him, Tengri. [*The travels of an alchemist*, i.e., *Chun jenren xiyou ji* 春真人西游記 by Li Zhichang 李志常, translated by A. Waley, London, 1931, p. 8, 33.]

These observations have consequences for our understanding of how the Tibetan court may have conceived of its *gnam* and *lha*. The use of dice-casting and reading prognostics indicates that, beyond their belief that these powers were in some way guiding their success, they had no fixed views about how their will could be read. This, in turn, implies that there was no set group at court responsible for interpreting them. We must consider that the btsan-pos had some power of augury that we are unaware of, and that this power was directly related to confidence in their military prowess. This was most likely done through divining the will of his ancestral *lha*, on which see Chapter Two.

The difference between this and even the world of the Old Testament is not as great as one might think. Peoples simply did not disregard the reality of others' spiritual powers.

"…Do those who forbid the worship of other gods deny their existence, or do they admit their existence while forbidding their worship? Various biblical scholars claim that the original biblical belief was monolatry, that is, a belief that does not deny the existence of other gods besides the god of Israel, but only forbids their worship. In the opinion of these scholars the biblical belief was a belief in a jealous god who forbade the worship of other gods. It did not present a new metaphysical picture in opposition to the syncretism practiced by the pagans; rather, it determined that ritual worship must be directed to the one God of Israel."—*Idolatry*, by Moshe Halbertal & Avishai Margalit, p. 182.)

This is one of the principal differences between the "Eastern" and "Western" approaches to worship. Few Asian polities followed a path of exclusive worship. A central message of nearly all ancient peoples was the potential of *all* spiritual beings. The acceptance of Buddhism at the Tibetan court should be seen in this context.

[10] The necessity to understand enemies may explain the origin of *dgra lha* and this, in turn, might be the concept behind *yuan di* of the Tang annals, on which below. This would explain an apparent ambiguity: Was it a spiritual being of enemies, or one to protect against them? The idea that the most useful spiritual beings were those that could provide information about the outside world means that perhaps it contained a little bit of both natures.

[11] We must speculate here on the original function of the modern *lha pa*: During the Imperium there should have existed a specialist whose function was to intermediate between the btsan-pos and their *lha*, ancestral spiritual beings who helped guide the fate of the Imperium. Through some method of prognostication, they would have informed the btsan-po of strategies, enemies, and the will of their ancestors. Today's *lha pa* may be a modern reinterpretation of such ancient concepts; the Sku Bla may have had such a function as well (*q.v.* Chapter Two).

[12] According to Marco Polo, "idolaters" (i.e., Tibetan Buddhists) at Qubilai's court told him to offer milk to his spirit protectors so that they would protect all that belongs to him—i.e., his empire. Cf. *The travels of Marco Polo*, tr. by L.F. Benedetto, London, Routledge & Sons, 1931, p. 99. The subtext of this is that Buddhists were supporting the creation or maintenance of the oath between Qubilai and his spirit protectors.

[13] In *Travels of an alchemist* we see the Mongols actively intermediating between quarelling Taoists and Buddhists at their court. They appraised the value of these practitioners not on their presence *per se*, but on their ability to function in their due place, i.e., in harmony as assets for the good functioning of their empire.

[14] The distinction between oathing as a social and political cement is, of course, an abstraction. Among some peoples, nearly every change of social status or creation of new social grouping required the approval of some over-arching spiritual being and a renewal of the oathed relationship with it by means of sacrifice. The example of the

Manchus is well documented (S.M. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental complex of the Tungus*, London, Kegan Paul, 1935, p. 123f; q.v. here its displacement by Buddhist values, as we see in Tibet). The Turks sacrificed animals frequently, often "because of a vow that fell due or as an offering". (R. Dankoff, "Kāšġarī on the beliefs and superstitions of the Turks". JAOS.95.1975.71.) The frequency was no doubt due, at least in part, to the need for stable economic and political relationships among the members of their confederations and with others they encountered.

[15] We can see this in the concept of *thugs*, which is not well understood, so no equivalent is hazarded here (see comments on *sku* in the next chapter). The *thugs* of the btsan-pos was not stable; *gdon* and *bdud* could enter them (*thugs su gdon bchug*; *rgyal po'i thugs la bdud zhugs* (FRANCKE.A.H.1926.v. 2.46) and cause poor decision-making, and perhaps madness. Thus, *gdon myi za ba* was a phrase, a swearing, to prove one's decision was not affected by spirits.

Khri Srong Lde Brtsan was perhaps motivated in part to turn to Buddhism because of a desire to find a haven from such disturbances. SBA BZHED.1982.37 reports that a fuller name of Bsam-yas was Thugs-dam Brag Dmar Bsam-yas, the phrase *thugs dam* (compare with the Old Tibetan phrase *yi dam*, both almost certainly Buddhist terms in origin connected with older Tibetan ideas) indicating that he oathed his *thugs* for care to the Buddhadharma and Sangha.

This shows us that one of the important concerns of religious specialists at court was to intervene in the event of, or at least interpret and explain, the irrational behavior of a Btsan-po. We thus gain a glimpse into Tibet's early *spiritual psychology*, in which the action of spirits was seen as determinant in explaining human behavior, both positive and negative. (On the "positive" side we have the inspiration of *lha* in aiding the military success of Btsan-pos.)

These beliefs remained an explanation into Phyi Dar historical works for why things went wrong, or why animosity developed, at court. Several such works record negative results of decisions that were later determined to have been due to spiritual beings afflicting btsan-pos; e.g., the *La-dwags rgyal rabs* in Francke, above, as well as the passages in truly old texts such as PT1047.88–101. Apparently, understanding why the btsan-po was doing what he was doing—what spirits might have been affecting him—was a bit of an obsession during the Imperium; it certainly was later. This makes good sense in light of observations in n. 9, above. The Fifth Dalai Lama explained that a local Mongol ruler, Chog-thu, was antipathetic to the Dge-lugs-pa because his mind had been taken over by a black demon (*nag po'i gdon gyis yid rnam par brlams pas*... at p. 241 of his *Gangs-can Yul gyi sa la spyod pa'i mtho ris... Rdzogs ldan gzhon nu'i dga' ston*, Delhi, Bod Gzhung Shes-rig Par-khang, 1981, p. 241). The author then reports that Chog-thu's army was destroyed in battle by Gu-shri Qan. This is framed by the Fifth Dalai Lama to make the moral point that those who oppose the Dge-lugs-pa are controlled by negative spiritual beings. These beings and those who rule as their agents can be controlled by the representatives of that tradition. (A few lines earlier, Gushri Qan was said "by the gods", *lha rnams gleng ngo*, to have been the second coming of the Dharmapāla Srong Btsan Sgam-po.)

The concept of spiritual psychology is perhaps worth further study as an element—or at least rationale—of the political world view of Tibet from the Imperial period until today.

[16] Preference of religious adherence in India was most frequently indicated by terms connected with worship (compounds created with *pūjā, sevā*, etc.) or priority of faithing (*paramasaugata*, *parameśvara*, *parama-X-bhakta*). Adherence was thus expressed as a matter of *preference*, not exclusive allegiance, and inscriptions frequently designate this preference for rulers by adding these qualifiers to their names/titles or, functionally, by stating that a gift for worship serves a particular purpose (*savabūd[d]hānam pūjāya*...). (Phraseology varied from dynasty to dynasty.) Some early Indian inscriptions, such as those of the Kushans, lack clear statements of any allegiance, and inscriptions celebrating gifts to Hindu institutions have been found for many "Buddhist" rulers in

later times. (Some Pāla rulers described themselves indiscriminately as *paramasaugata* and *parameśvara*.) Onomastic studies of the early Indian Buddhist site of Sāñcī (e.g., the example proposed by G. Schopen in "What's in a name: the religious function of the early donative inscriptions", reproduced in *Buddhist monks and business matters*, p. 384) also shows what we might call a "weak attraction" (a non-exclusive binding) between donors and their affiliation to Buddhism in Buddhist India.

[17] We have this note from inscriptional material relating to Gopāla II, from the 10th century, who is generally considered a "Buddhist" ruler. He donated land to a Brahmin family of *śāntivārika*s, who were ensconced in a special room in his palace to help avert evil influences damaging the royal family. The author who studied this inscription felt it necessary to add, "The Pāla rulers were not sectarian but enlightened Buddhists", as if we know of any truly *sectarian* "Buddhist" rulers in India. (See Gauiswar Bhattacharya, "The new Pāla ruler, Gopāla (II), son of Śurapāla (I)", in *Facets of Indian culture: Gustav Roth felicitation volume* (Patna: Bihar Puravid Parishad), 1998, pp. 180–181.

[18] Note the complex chemistry between the Abbasids, on the one hand, and the only recently converted Buddhist Barmakids and former Zoroastrians; this obtained until the final centralization of power in 9th Century Muslim Iran. (H. Kennedy, "The Barmakid revolution in Islamic government", *Pembroke papers*.1.1990.89–98; on some specifics of the Buddhist background of the Barmakids, see my "Jābir, the Buddhist Yogi, Part III". *Lungta*.16.2003.21–36. For an overtly political syncretism see C.I. Beckwith, "The plan of the City of Peace: Central Asian Iranian factors in early ʿAbbāsid design". AOH.37.1984.143–164.) It is even reported, for the fifteenth century, that a Timurid saw a Buddhist monastery and a Tekke of *darvīsh* side-by-side in Hami; see E. Esin, "The Turkish Baḳšı...", *op. cit.*, p. 111.)

On the Greek medical tradition at the Tibetan court, see C.I. Beckwith, "The introduction of Greek medicine into Tibet in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries". JAOS.99.1979.297–313. To the extent that this is to be considered a historical process, the transmission was undoubtedly via Buddhists of the Bactria-Tokharistan area, with whom the Tibetans were in direct contact.

[19] There are disconnects in the data between older, non-Old Tibetan materials and Old Tibetan texts dealing with the death and burial of a btsan-po (WALTER & BECKWITH.1997.1041f). Later data in post-Imperial Old Tibetan texts describe these burials in detail, but it can be questioned whether they represent Imperial practices at all (discussed in Chapter Three). In addition, there is a "Bon" collection entitled *'Dur chog*, certainly much later and suffused with Buddhist terminology, but which is, again, supposed to describe Imperial funeral rituals. Among them there is very little vocabulary in common, and few concepts.

To what do we attribute this discontinuity of tradition? Most of it is due to great exaggeration, at least, in the role of "Bon-pos" at the courts of the Btsan-pos. Some is also due to the general fracturing of knowledge about early traditions in later times. Future observations and conclusions should await the progress of excavation and exploration in the TAR and surrounding areas. Tibet's imperial burial traditions need to be reconstructed through a combination of textual sources and archaeological data, such as is presented in A. Heller's article cited in n. 73. For further observations about the authenticity of the Bon tradition in general, see n. 78 and Chapter Three.

[20] Aside from the religio-political terms and phrases in the inscriptions, whose principal elements are studied in the next chapter, the best indication we have of "non-Buddhist" religious conceptions in them is several references to "heaven" (*gnam*) and "Heaven and Earth" (*gnam sa*), an apposition of little note in Buddhist traditions. The earliest datable citation is from the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan (the 'Phyong Rgyas inscr., line 7): *gnam sa'i chos dang ni 'thun par mdzad*, "behaving in accordance with the *chos* of heaven and earth". (We will discuss *chos* below.)

gnam sa is probably a polar compound; this is its only occurance in the inscriptions; *gnam gyi lha* occurs twice. Both phrases are telling about their central meaning. Some have seen in them reflections of Chinese values, which might seem obvious. However,

the situation is not so clear. (Of course, Chinese conceptions of "Heaven and Earth" can be found in early Tibet, fairly clearly—and identified as such—in the *Gnam sa snang brgyad* literature.) *gnam* can be well understood as an integral part of a Tibetan world-view which was basic to Imperial ideology. On this, see Chapter Two, n. 61.

The apposition of (Father) Heaven and (Mother) Earth is also an ancient Indo-European conception (e.g., Klaus Strunk, "'Vater Himmel'—Tradition und Wandel einer sakralsprachlichen Formel". *Serta Indogermanica*, Innsbruck, 1982, pp. 427–438), and conceptions very similar to the Tibetan are found in the Kül Tegin and Tonyukuk inscriptions of the early Turks (Talat Tekin, *A grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, p. 263, 265, 288) of a male Tengri/Heaven and female (sometimes Umay)/Earth as supportive presences. These conceptions are also very close to values found in motifs in the text (IO370,5) referred to by Richardson as the "Dharma that fell from Heaven", discussed below.

One point which separates Tibetan *gnam* from Chinese *tian* is the idea of "phenomenalism", a distinctly Chinese value which colors the emperor as a figure different from the btsan-po. It is the idea that natural phenomena reflect the morality and actions of the ruler. (On phenomenalism in a Buddhist-Taoist context, see R. Sharf, *Coming to terms with Chinese Buddhism*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2002, pp. 88–90. Such ideas *can* be found in some post-Imperial Tibetan materials, and they could easily reflect ideas of Indian and Chinese origin. These concepts are not found in Imperial-period sources.)

Using an analytical category from linguistics, we could say that the concept of an apposed "Heaven and Earth" is too non-distinctive to demonstrate an influence of Chinese ideas on Tibetan, or of their mutual and exclusive sharing. It was such a widespread concept in the ancient Asian world that we have no reason to prefer Chinese influence over some untraceable ancient Tibetan concept, or some other foreign source. It thus is an example of a very early Tibetan belief, one we can confidently refer to as "non- (and pre-) Buddhist", but this is more because we know the apposition is insignificant in Buddhism than because we have a solid understanding of its origins.

In an historical analysis we can also see "Father Heaven" to be a likely Indo-European intrusion in Chinese culture during its formative period, the replacement of the Shang Dynasty by the Zhou. Toward the end of the former dynasty, elements of Steppe Culture, such as the chariot, which was the weapon par excellence as well as an innovation of Indo-European warriors throughout Eurasia, appeared in China. This would be an excellent example of the spread east of the Central Eurasian Culture Complex, on which see n. 64. (This may also be responsible for some of the similarities between Chinese and Tibetan concepts of "heaven", which has to do with the descent from "above" to rule "below". More on this in Chapter Two, but see also here A. Wang, *Cosmology and political culture in early China*, p. 56 especially.)

A more specific argument against preferring a Chinese origin for many religio-political Tibetan ideas is that China has never been a powerful distributor of such concepts, as opposed, say, to a culture such as Iran. Many Central Eurasian peoples—including the Tibetans—obtained some significant artistic, intellectual and bureaucratic/annalistic influences from China, but not from its religio-political ethos (this does not, of course, apply to Chinese Buddhist schools). In neither the Old Turkic inscriptions nor the *Secret history of the Mongols*—which bridge the Imperium in time—can one find Chinese inspiration, or a desire for modelling the Chinese court. One basis for this is clear enough: All sovereign rulers outside of China believed, as did the Chinese Emperor, that they were legitimate universal monarchs; modelling themselves or their courts on Chinese customs would make no sense. We have little evidence even for this; one example may be the Uyghur rulers in Xinjiang.

There is good Old Tibetan evidence that the btsan-pos saw no limit to their right of expansion (*Pace* the arguments put forward in BISCHOFF.F.1968.29f, wherein one statement of obeisence on the part of Srong Btsan Sgam-po does not a system make. Bischoff has in part based his position on a peculiar interpretation of one non-Old

Tibetan document cited on page 28 there). Whatever they ruled was theirs through their own political mythology of descent, and there is no reason to believe that they conceived the Imperium should have a particular size. Phrases such as *phyogs bzhi mtha' bzhi bkyes* [PT958], *dbu rmog brtsan zhing chab srid mtha' skyes* [read *bkyes*] *pa* [PT1287], *dbu rmog btsan de phyogs bcur mtha' skyes* [read *bkyes*] (in the Brag Lha-mo inscription from the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan), and *mtha' bzhi'i rgyal po gzhan dang myi 'dra ste* in the 'Phyong Rgyas inscription (RICHARDSON.H.1985.38, line 17) are classic examples of the 'Lord of the Four Quarters' principle. In other words, the Imperium evinces here a version of the ancient belief in which a true sovereign has the right—even duty—to conquer as far as possible in every direction from the 'center', his royal city. (On the reading *bkyes* for *skyes*, see HELLER.A.1997.389n, a correction suggested by Samten Karmay. We should also note that in Buddhist sources we find overt references to Cakravartins as 'Lords of the Four Quarters' and that the expressions here are classic statements of ancient Indo-European thinking about the role of a righteous ruler.)

To borrow important concepts supporting their power from China would be admitting that their basis for power was fraudulent. The Mongol khans also saw no limit to their imperium's power, based on the strength of *möngke tengri*, however much that has been seen, interestingly, as an "unsophisticated and unconditional claim to legitimacy as universal rulers" by at least one Sinologist (H. Franke in *From tribal chieftain to universal emperor and god: the legitimation of the Yüan Dynasty*, pp. 16f). It is interesting that, just as the btsan-pos saw their power as coming "from heaven", *gnam*, Mongolian sources frequently describe the basis of Chingis Qan's power as coming *tngri-ece*, "from heaven". It may be assumed that any leader who feels himself under the direction of a transcendent power, described by some as "heaven", will not necessarily feel constrained to observe the boundaries drawn by others.

To return to *gnam*: One way we can clarify the idea of "heaven" for the early Tibetans is to look at the compound *gnam gyi lha*. Briefly, if the *lha* were, as I assert in the next chapter, the ancestral spiritual beings of the noble leadership, then this phrase refers to their (past and future) home, both their origin and where they live "as on earth" after this life, continuing to support the living btsan-pos, who are part of an unbroken manifestation of *lha*-ness. (There is more discussion of this point below, but notice the close similarities in the Kül Tegin inscription at T. Tekin, *op. cit.*, p. 267 and 272).

This is not to say that the Chinese did not have similar conceptions. Many religious ideas, like their linguistic counterparts, should be considered in a separate category—*areal phenomena*, for example—until their origin or spread can be sufficiently clarified. This is especially useful considering the problems surrounding a coherent Tibeto-Burman linguistic hypothesis of divergence, and a reconstructable culture for peoples asserted to be related in that way. The creation of a context sufficient to explain the special features of Tibet's early religious beliefs needs to take into account any older features shared, or which seem to be shared, amongst all, or nearly all, East Asian peoples. This includes the possibility that all these peoples share elements of an early Indo-European intrusion into East Asia, which has long been known, but consistently undervalued, as a contributor of technologies and ideology.* For a conventional viewpoint see A. Wang, *Cosmology and political culture in early China*, esp. p. 56 for the concept of the emperor's relation to *tian*. The author seems to accept it as an internal development, so often the case in Chinese studies, and fails to consider other possible origins. Also, of course, scholarship has not done much to define with any detail what this "heaven" might have been like, either for the Tibetans or the Chinese. Comparing the details of this conception is a necessary first step in deciding intelligently their points of origin, or whether there has been strong influence in one or both directions.

(*Data from solid, older research on China and the West is summarized in a website archive, "Aryans: culture bearers to China" (forum.skad.net/archive); continuing research on the early Tokharian burials also is to be examined. Interestingly, scholars in China seem to have a more open mind about such influences than many western

Sinologists. For a linguistic consideration of Indo-European presence in this area, see C.I. Beckwith, "Toward a Tibeto-Burman theory" in *Medieval Tibeto-Burman languages II*, Leiden, 2006, pp. 1–38.)

Unfortunately, a thoughtful appreciation of whatever role early Indo-Europeans had in eastern Central and East Asia is hardly a boom industry, despite the fact that both early Tibetan and Chinese cultures manifest numerous influences which obviously come from that source, directly or indirectly.

[21] The dynamic relationship among families, clans and other groupings in Central Eurasia is not necessarily well addressed if one has recourse to standard anthropological overviews such as *The ethnic origins of nations* by Anthony D. Smith. A better work for this area is Edward Schatz, "State constructivism and clans in Central Asia", which is available in an online draft dated February 9, 2001.

There are certainly specific values that separate the confederations of the Tibetans, Turks, and Mongols. The btsan-pos were, after all, somewhat different sorts of rulers than qans or qaghans. Differences may lie in Tibet's more mountainous topography, which resulted in special characteristics of their customary rules (*lugs*), as well as the proximity of Khotanese, Newari and Indian cultures, which were the models the Tibetan leadership looked to for many of their political concepts.

For example, what were the rules of inheritance among the family members of the btsan-pos? We might believe in at least a father-to-son succession, if we didn't have Srong Btsan Sgam-po succeeding his own son and taking his wife as his own queen! Perhaps an oath bound the noble clans to each new btsan-po, similar to what evolved among the Ottoman Turks when they swore not to pass ruleship to any but the lineage of Kayı, as long as it might survive. Such rites become especially necessary for peoples if their rules of succession were not clear, or were often not followed. (For various tribes, beginning with the Kök Türk, see "The Ottoman succession and its relation to the Turkish concept of sovereignty", by Halil Inancik, in *The Middle East and the Balkans under the Ottoman Empire*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 37ff).

Likewise, the concept of "bone" is extremely widespread in Central Eurasian societies, where it is used to determine social status, clan appurtenance and, sometimes, inheritance order. What role did it play in the Imperium? This is an important question, considering that it remains a dominant concept in Tibetan societies (as presented in N. Levine, "The theory of *rü* kinship, descent and status in a Tibetan society". *Asian highland societies in anthropological perspective* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1981), pp. 52–78, a very good study of several Tibetan societies), and that we find *gdung brgyud*, 'lineage', used several times with reference to the family of the btsan-pos, even in Buddhist contexts (see n. 26).

To answer questions such as these requires a diachronic anthropological and comparative political approach to leadership in traditional Central Eurasian confederations, which is far beyond this work. (And something not undertaken by anyone yet.) The questions raised here are just a sample of those that might help us understand the social structure of the Imperium, and, hence, how religions functioned within it.

[22] Oaths are always mentioned in Classical sources in direct, or implied, political contexts. The Lombards allowed military captives to join them by taking one, thus increasing the numbers of their military—this would have been a useful method for the Tibetans, with the large number of non-Tibetans in their service—see H. Moisl, *Lordship and tradition in barbarian Europe*, p. 41). The Scythians, a people whose religio-political institutions shared many similarities to the Tibetans, provide us with very early data (see the reference to Herodotus in n. 41, p. 292f, for both court and war-oaths. On the Celts, see J.A. MacCulloch, *The religion of the ancient Celts* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1911) p. 172f and 292 (especially martial oaths). Societies that used oathing almost always applied it on several levels to hold various branches of government and society together.

[23] The ancient Tibetan tradition of annual and triennial oathings attested at JTS.2 and XTS.82 is clearly a part of a "non-Buddhist" complex, and in these references we have the only early versions of their oaths. We will discuss one religious and cultural implication of these rites in the next note. Here we will only say that, while animal sacrifice has continued to be a part of Tibet's religious culture, it has changed over time and its present forms should be compared with this ancient, meagre data in a separate study.

The tradition of oathing no doubt changed greatly over time; whatever may remain in contemporary Tibetan culture has been little studied. One anthropologically-based study which includes references to the older practices is Guntram Hazod, "Yul lha and dbu rmog" (*Kinship, social change, and evolution. Vienna contributions on ethnology and anthropology*.5.1989.209–228, esp. p. 210 and 213). The logical place of oathing is particularly clear in studies such as "Pho lha and Yul lha among the Khumbo, North-Eastern Nepal", by H. Diemberger and C. Schicklgruber (*Kinship, social change, and evolution. Vienna contributions on ethnology and anthropology*.5.1989.199–208). Here, one can easily infer that earlier there were oaths which bound the *pho lha* and *yul lha* in familial and local social interactions. However, now the institution of oaths binding Tibetans and spiritual beings has been transferred to Buddhist ritual. This is an important example of how Tibet's spiritual culture changed with the development of Buddhism and the fall of the Imperium. Studying these rituals in both contexts is important to understand universals within the religio-political thinking of the Tibetans.

[24] There are four principal studies on the ritual elements in peace treaties involving the Chinese and Tibetans during the Tang. These are, chronologically, Friedrich Bischoff, "Recherches sur les principes légaux des traités internationaux des T'ang", *Studies in South, East, and Central Asia: presented as a memorial volume to the late Professor Raghu Vira*, pp. 11–36; R.A. Stein, "Les serments des traités sino-tibétains (8e–9e siécles)" (TP.74.1988.119–138); Y. Pan, "The Sino-Tibetan treaties in the Tang Dynasty" (TP.78.1992.116–161); and, Y. Imaeda, "Rituel des traités de paix sino-tibétains du VIII^{e} au IX^{e} siécle" (*La Sérinde, terre d'échange*, pp. 87–98).

The basic narrative structure of these rites, attested in Tibetan at JTS.29 and XTS.128f, seems simple. However, providing more context opens questions concerning whose rites belonged to whom, and what this says about how religions served their courts.

On the Tibetan side, Y. Imaeda.2001.92 was able to correct R. Stein's impression that the Tibetans insisted on a Buddhist rite apart from the act wherein the treaty parties moistened the lips with the blood of sacrificial animals (JTS.42–45). A more thorough reading of the text of the rite of 762 persuaded Imaeda that the Tibetans here were only acknowledging that when *they* oathed by sacrificing animals, they made sure not to do this in Buddhist temples, for obvious reasons. Likewise, during the 783 oathing in Ra-sa (Lhasa), after each party had sacrificed animals (Imaeda.2001.93), the Tibetans chose to hold their reading of the peace-oath (in Tibetan) in a "tent of the Buddha". The only eye-witness account of the Ra-sa oath rite presents it thus (Imaeda.95).

Imaeda sees this, reasonably, as evidence that "autochthonous" rites somehow survived until the end of the Imperium alongside Buddhist rites, and that this was a "failure" by a devout Buddhist ruler to eradicate them (Imaeda, *op. cit.*, p. 96). Since we have no evidence that any btsan-po promoted Buddhism as an exclusive faith, even Khri Srong Lde Brtsan (more on this below), by the additive formula advanced in this chapter—that rulers often accomodated adherents of various religions and spiritual beings at their courts to "cover all their bases" and utilize whatever powers they had—Ral-pa-can was deliberately utilizing both systems to support his power. (The political benefits would be obvious.) It is actually unlikely that this was simply meant as an internal compromise or placation, since of course matching rites were performed on Chinese soil, far away from the Tibetan court, and participants there would have understood international protocol. (For an interesting analysis of a Confucian-Buddhist

conflict at the Tang court, and how this really did affect the treaty proceedings of 782–783, see BISCHOFF.F.1968.19.)

Some things can be said about the meaning of these animal sacrifices. When the Chinese delegation proposes that they sacrifice a cow and the Tibetans a horse, it was probably because these animals were symbols of indispensable resources for their cultures (BISCHOFF.F.1968.21). The implication is that, whichever side violates the oath of the peace treaty, its spiritual-being protectors will cause them to suffer the loss of that resource. (Perhaps this is why substitute animals were actually offered when the rite was held.) This is one explanation for the rites in the first place (cf. Pan's article, p. 154, quoting the text of the 732 peace treaty, and compare JTS.2). Of course, a horse also symbolizes Tibetan culture, both in its pastoral and military dimensions.

Animal sacrifices were used even earlier in Tibet (see above note) to cement clan and tribal confederations, which is another reason Tibetans—even Buddhists—might not have objected to these rites on an international level. This gives us reason to examine these rites for supplementary information. At the triennial "great oaths", human beings (perhaps), horses, cattle and asses (so at XTS.82; differently at JTS.2) were sacrificed to ancestral beings in their heavens (*gnam lha*), earth, mountains, rivers, sun, moon, stars and planets. (For a consideration of the early significance of *gnam* to Tibetans, see n. 19; for its political dimension, see Chapter Two, nn. 17 and 62.)

Horse sacrifice was a particularly powerful acknowledgment of their debt for this "gift" of their ancestors. The Scythians also sacrificed cattle and horses, their flesh first offered to their spiritual beings, presumably as thanks (W. Brandenstein, "Die Abstammungssagen der Skythen", WZKM.52.1953.193; they also sacrificed human beings—as the Tibetans?—see also WALTER & BECKWITH.1997.1041f). The royal ideology of both peoples, based on these sacrifices and their burial rites, indicates that their courts here on earth were seen to be in a continuity with the courts of their ancestors now "in heaven", where they also lived on in their own courts as *gnam lha*. In other words, the living leaders and their subjects were making offerings to their ancestral leaders in their heavenly courts in thankfulness for the support they were continuing to bring their peoples. A continuing contract with these past leaders is implicit in the oaths which are recited with these sacrifices.

Passages about these rites in later Tibetan literature provide details which may help us understand them better. Some of these are cited in H. Uebach, "dByar-mo-thaṅ and Goṅ-bu ma-ru…" (*Tibetan history and language: studies dedicated to Uray Géza on his seventieth birthday*. Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, pp. 497–526). Sources there tell of the use of a stone on which are carved sun and moon symbols, over which the swearing was made (pp. 499f, 506f). This is most interesting, and, in connection with other references to celestial phenomena, shows that Tibetans at this time held them in great esteem. In particular, according to Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag, they were called to witness, along with the Triratna (p. 512), signaling the acknowledgment that all had some power over the signers to affect the welfare of their states. Research on the origins of these rites should take into account a possible Brahmanic element. R. Burghart ("Gifts to the Gods", p. 202) noted that the sun and moon were called to witnesses in royal rituals involving donations of property by the king to his *iṣṭadevatā*; ministers participated in this declaration with the ruler.

[25] Tantric materials contain many rites of a specialized nature. Such variety indicates that they were designed to cultivate particular audiences, political leadership included. Rites which may have been limited to special audiences date to the earliest Tantric literature. These include those for creating a Cakravartin, contained in three chapters of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, on which see Chapter Four.

[26] Assuming the historicity of this event, the political reality of the situation was that Khri Srong Lde Brtsan actually controlled what was the Swat Valley or Oḍ[ḍ]iyāna at the time this "invitation" was extended. Thus, Padmasambhava appeared before him as one of his subjects. If his fame was as great as later tradition maintains, he

was likely commanded to appear, or physically brought to court, at the Btsan-po's order. (Just as Hwa-shang Mahāyāna was "invited" to Lhasa shortly after Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's forces had occupied Shazhou; cf. H.E. Richardson, "'The Dharma that came down from Heaven…'", in *Buddhist thought and Asian civilization* (Emeryville, CA: Dharma Publishing, 1977, p. 224. Perhaps the classic example of this situation in translation literature is that of the Taoist Changchun. When summoned to Chingis Khan's court, his disciple-biographer reported that his master "knew a refusal was out of the question"; cf. Arthur Waley, *The travels of an alchemist*, p. 51.) In the same way that astrologers and alchemists served Mediaeval European and Mongol courts (see the interesting report by Marco Polo about how Christian, Chinese and other astrologers were put to work simultaneously at Qanbaliq to benefit the Qaghan and kingdom at *The travels of Marco Polo: the complete Yule-Cordier edition* (London; John Murray, 1929), v. 1, p. 446), Padmasambhava would have been expected to provide benefits to his new patron and ruler.

On the history and political geography of this time, see Christopher I. Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, p. 162n. For an appreciation of the importance of Oḍ[ḍ]iyāna, see now also Ronald M. Davidson, "Hidden realms and pure abodes: Central Asian Buddhism as frontier religion in the literature of India, Nepal and Tibet", *Pacific world*. 3rd series, vol. 4.2002.153–181, especially pp. 160–163.

[27] This is attested explicitly for Zhi-ba 'Od in the eleventh century (see my "The significance of the term *ring lugs*".AOH.51.1998.315n), in the phrase *byang chub sems dpa'i gdung brgyud*, used in PT841. However, this conception has roots in the very contruction of Bsam-yas as Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's "family" complex, and analogies in Khotan (*op. cit*., p. 314n; see also Chapter Four, here). Such a meaning is also implicit in a passage in the Skar Chung inscription, ll. 2–4 (reign of Sad-na Legs): *Dkon Mchog Gsum gyï rten btsugs pa las stsogs pa / gdung rabs rgyud kyïs / 'di ltar Sangs Rgyas kyï chos mdzad pa…*; this is even more clear in l. 25: *gdung rabs rgyud kyïs yi dam bca'o*. There also exists a supposed letter from Buddhaguhya to the citizens of Tibet. It has some old phrasings, although as we have it, it is not at all an Old Tibetan text. We quote from its opening, after the incipit: *Bod kyi Spu Rgyal mgo nag yongs kyi rje / Khri Srong Lde'u Btsan Ag Tshom mes kyi sras / Rlung Nag 'Phrul-gyi rgyal-po'i dbon po yi / Srong Btsan Sgam-po Spyan Ras Gzigs kyi sku / byang chub sems dpa'i sku rgyud gdung ma chad*. [BUDDHAGUHYA.135] If this really does represent ninth-century belief, it clearly links all the btsan-pos into a Bodhisattva tradition in a way that matches statements in the Skar Cung inscription.

From these examples it is clear that there was a widespread tradition that, through sharing an *iṣṭadevatā*, the members of the royal family had joined a Buddha *kula* which was perpetuated by inheritance. These passages also show clearly that *yi dam* in the inscriptions is a Buddhist term from its inception (on which see n. 15).

[28] There are only a few verifiably "lost" Old Tibetan documents, the most significant perhaps being portions of the *Annals*. We have no reason to believe that a vast amount of important, ancient written sources on the Imperium await discovery. Although S. Karmay has presented and analyzed "lost" materials referring to ancient times ("The etiological problem of the Yar-lung Dynasty", *Tibetan studies* (München: Kommission für Zentralasiatische Studien, 1988), pp. 219–222 and "The origin of the first king of Tibet as revealed in the *Can-lnga*", *Tibetan studies* (Oslo: Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1994), vol. 1, pp. 408–429), there is no indication that these materials would be, if found, truly "Old Tibetan" in either language or spirit, much less from the Imperial period. It is difficult to baldly accept a great antiquity for the contents of the material he cites, since what has been preserved of them is a set of topics which actually preoccupied Phyi Dar writers, such as Glang Dar-ma's assassination by Dpal-gyi Rdo-rje, or the putative conflict between Bon-pos and Buddhists at the Imperial courts.

At this point in our studies, an even more salient fact is that, out of the thousands of Old Tibetan texts and documents scattered throughout libraries and museums, only a few hundred have been closely studied. Thus, we are (with the exception of Tsuguhito Takeuchi, who actually may have seen and examined them all) attempting to rebuild an ancient world with only a small sampling of what we might, and should, be working with.

[29] How do we explain the explosion of stories about the relationships between Sanghas and Btsan-pos in the first centuries of the Phyi Dar? The dominant element was certainly the desire to construct a situation which showed the Sanghas having more power at courts than they actually exerted. Little or no recourse to historical precedent was required; these stories were designed and presented to display an ideal Buddhist society, one that has the required close interdependence between devoutly Buddhist rulers with a desire for universal enlightenment and their learned monk and yogi advisors. This provided the necessary model for how later Tibetan rulers and monks (specifically, Bka'-gdams-pa at first) should relate. Dramatic scenarios were created, most likely including the debate at Bsam-yas, where Khri Srong Lde Brstan must be an arbiter between squabbling groups of practitioners, as well as a defender of Buddhism against enemies of the Sangha such as practitioners of Bon. (SBA BZHED.2000.79ff)

[30] This applies above all to polemics surrounding U-dum Btsan AKA Wu'i/'U'i Dun Brtan AKA Dpal Dun Brtan, i.e., Glang Dar-ma. One can still read today in surveys that this last btsan-po was an "anti-Buddhist" emperor. However, the reality is almost certainly otherwise. Aside from the fact that he ruled only one or two years, the surviving evidence which may be contemporary or near so (PT134, PT840, and the 'Phang Thang-ma catalog), and which discusses his relationship with Buddhism, shows someone who had ordered monasteries and stupas built, and had even composed works on Buddhism. Also, closer analysis of ancient sources calls into question how he died, disposing of the motif of Lha Lung Dpal-gyi-rdo-rje. One these points see Yamaguchi, cited below; the interpretation of PT134 by this scholar is to be preferred to that of C. Scherrer-Schaub in "Prière pour un apostat". *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*.11.1999–2000.217–246, who accepts the conventional, unsubstantiated view of Glang Dar-ma.

If Glang Dar-ma was both a supporter of Buddhism *and* a Buddhist, how did he acquire such a bad reputation? Interestingly, part of the answer might lie in climate change. At the time of his reign—839, according to the XTS—a disastrous weather change struck Central and East Asia. It brought disease and famine, and there were heavy snowfalls. Evidence for other causes lacking, it seems clear it was at least partly responsible for the fall of several empires, including the Uyghur and Tibetan, and it damaged the Tang. On this see C. Mackerras, *The Uighur Empire, 744–840, according to the T'ang dynastic histories*, p. 124.

The results of these disasters were manifold. Because of the depletion of livestock and its feed, and crops humans lived on, these powers were now unable to sustain military operations, guard trade routes and—more importantly—pay their retainers, soldiers, and bureaucrats. Tibet was also unable to support Buddhist institutions because its infrastucture was falling apart and the economy failing. The totality of these causes thrust Tibet into chaos (Yamaguchi, *op. cit.*, p. 238, quoting PT230) and Sanghas and their supporters ultimately ended up giving him a bad name for later generations because he was unable to continue supporting them. We need to remember that oaths involving the support of the Dharma had almost certainly been given by him—as by Khri Srong Lde Brstan and other of his predecessors—so it was actually his *responsibility* to continue supporting them. When he couldn't, he was seen as a failure. This is the most likely explanation for the somewhat plaintive tone of the Sangha in PT134.

To this, we need to add that Glang Dar-ma *had* to be portrayed as an evil emperor in the Tang sources to fit Chinese conceptions about social conditions at the end of any dynasty. These ideas were current even before the Tang in the form of the non-canonical sutra, the "Scripture for humane kings" (仁王護國般若波羅蜜經, *Renwang*

huguo bore boluomi jing), which dates to at least the fifth century. This document lays the blame for the decline of the Dharma on kings and their relationship with the Sangha. On this, see Charles Orzech, "Metaphor, translation, and the construction of kingship", pp. 62–64 in particular.

On Glang Dar-ma and his reign, see especially: Imaeda, Yoshiro, "Chinese texts on the Tibetan king Glang Dar ma", *Bukkyō-gaku seminā*.74.2001.26–38; Samten Karmay, *Btsan-po Lha Sras Dar-ma dang de'i rjes su byung ba'i rgyal rabs mdor bsdus* (Dharamsala: Bod-kyi Dpe-mdzod-khang, 1986); Yamaguchi Zuihō, "The fiction of King Dar-ma's persecution of Buddhism", *De Dunhuang au Japon* (Genève: Librarie Droz, 1996), pp. 231–258 (n. 10 refers to three prior articles on Glang Dar-ma by the author which present important re-evaluations of the chronology of the last Btsan-pos), and S. Karmay, "King Lang Darma and his rule", *Tibet and her neighbors*, pp. 57–67, which also interprets PT134.

It is interesting that none of these (or other) articles speculate on what other reasons, beyond his being considered a "persecutor" of Buddhism, might have accounted for his demonization by later Buddhist tradition.

[31] One good overview of this situation is H.-J. Klimkeit, *Die Begegnung von Christentum, Gnosis und Buddhismus an der Seidenstrasse* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986), which complements his later compendium, *Gnosis on the Silk Road* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993). Although religionists often see the spread of religions on the "Silk Road" as an isolated, self-perpetuated phenomenon, this process was a product of the same efforts to control and expand commerce in Central Eurasia that motivated its great empires to come into being in the first place. Thus, trade and religion are linked even more closely than has often been assumed. (I cite here only one study of the confused landscape this produced: "Iranians in China: Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Bureaus of Commerce", by A. Forte. *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*.11.1999–2000.277–290.) At the Mongol court, the question was not simply Christian, but *quel sorte?*, for, in a situation easily applicable to Buddhist groups, there was definitely jostling at the Mongol court of Möngke Qaghan between the interests of the Nestorian and Roman (Franciscan) Christians, on which see the journal of William of Rubruck in *The Mongol mission*, edited by C. Dawson, 1955, pp. 153–156.

The present study does not address the potential impact of such conflicts on (at least parts of) the Tibetan Imperium. Those interested may profitably consult: P. Gignoux, "Sur quelques contacts entre l'Iran et le Thibet", *Orientalia Iosephi Tucci memoriae dicata* (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1987), vol. 2, pp. 501–507; D. Martin, "An Uighur sacral kingship complex?", the fifth chapter of his *Mandala cosmogony*...; Stein, R.A., "Une mention du Manichéisme dans le choix du Bouddhisme comme religion d'état par le roi tibétain Khri-sroṅ Lde-bcan", pp. 329–337; and, G. Uray, "Tibet's connections with Nestorianism and Manicheism in the 8th–10th centuries", pp. 399–429.

[32] One may gauge the tenor of this by comparing the earliest documents on Buddhist doctrine in Tibetan that we know of. On the one hand, we have works ascribed—an ascription we adhere to here—to Khri Srong Lde Brtsan himself (e.g., the BKA' YANG DAG and the two documents preserved in DPA'-BO.1985.370–375, the extended introduction to the Bsam-yas edict and the *chos 'byung* which accompanied that edict). On the other hand, we have the *Lta ba'i khyad par* and the *Bsam gtan mig sgron*. The former was most likely composed late in the Imperium by Sna-nam Zhang Ye-shes Sde; copies survive as PT814 and Suzuki Tripitaka #5847. The latter was composed after the fall of the Imperium by Gnubs Chen Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes, who was born *ca.* 844.

The works attributed to Khri Srong Lde Brtsan are, in a word, idiosyncratic in their presentation of basic Buddhist concepts. The BKA' YANG DAG has much more detail, but one need not believe either was composed by him to realize that they represent the views of someone with some basic knowledge of Buddhism but with no need to express it from an sophisticated or doctrinal viewpoint. They either represent the views

the Sangha at his court thought he needed to have, or monks gave him only general guidance as he worked out his own understanding of Buddhist teachings.

The two latter works, on the other hand, were composed by authors with relatively encyclopedic views of doctrine and meditational practices who had the didactic goal of informing others about their view of Buddhist traditions. They are among the earliest examples of the scholastic tradition in Tibetan Buddhism.

[33] For a brief history of Buddhism in Khotan, see D. Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism* (London: Serindia Publications, 1987), pp. 331–343. Seven monasteries were constructed in Tibet to house the monks from Khotan, and it is traditionally explained that these were provided at the behest of Mes Ag Tshom's Chinese wife, Kim-shing Kong-co, i.e., Jin-cheng gongzhu 金城公主 "the Princess of Jin Cheng". On the narrative about this see H. Hoffmann, *Religions of Tibet* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961), p. 40f). If this is the case, it is the first example of royal patronage of Buddhist Sanghas in Tibet, predating the construction of Bsam-yas. It is also just one of several examples of how Buddhist queens, Newari, Chinese, and Tibetan, altered Tibet's history by nudging btsan-pos to support Sanghas, the construction of temples, etc.

When discussing the role of wives at courts, we should mention that both Kim-shing Kong-co and her predecessor Wen-cheng ended up marrying emperors ruling after those they were intended to, giving us a view of the flexibility of royal marriage alliances. Indeed, Srong Btsan Sgam-po ended up marrying a princess intended for his son, when the former returned to rule. (On Kimshing Kongco's journey to Tibet see Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, Princeton, 1993, p. 76.) One has to wonder what religious beliefs existed at the Tibetan court to cover the harmonizing of the spirits of royal families at the time of marriages and deaths. It must have been complicated and flexible, considering that many btsan-pos had wives from various tribes and peoples.

[34] The similar *Li Yul lung bstan pa* and *Li Yul chos kyi lo rgyus* (PT960) are full of political motifs designed to show the value of honoring Buddhist teachings and worship to a ruler. (Citing here the edition of R.E. Emmerick, *Tibetan texts concerning Khotan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967.) It is interesting that the first is mentioned immediately after Khotan was "created" and blessed by Buddha, and was provided with a stupa, which became a meeting-place for Buddhist spirit-protectors to gather (p. 5, where the recitation of Mahayana sutras will pacify enemies, *g.yul zhi bar 'gyur*, this being given as the reason why the Sanghas of Khotan recite those texts there each season; cf. p. 82). Both documents are composed of motifs in which monks guided the kings of Khotan into proper Buddhist conduct, such as constructing stupas and viharas. This resulted in those rulers attaining a sacred state on the basis of their being agents of the Buddha, and their nation (a special field of Buddhas of the Three Times, *zhing khud pa*, p. 78) benefitted from this acknowledgement.

The causality in these documents is clear and parallels Buddhist ritual: Worship of protectors as a sign of respect for the Buddhadharma ensures peace and welfare; the Sanghas perform these rituals for the king; the king, in turn, implicitly acknowledges that Khotan is property of the Buddha, and in a sense has become a mandala or monastery, two other constructions which symbolically express control by Buddhist spiritual beings.

Such beliefs continue attitudes expressed frequently in Indic inscriptions. In these, the Buddha is always present wherever the Sangha is. Consequently, any acknowledgement by a ruler of the Sangha's importance at court equates to handing over his kingdom to the Buddha, on which see G. Schopen, "The Buddha as an owner of property and permanent resident in medieval Indian monasteries", pp. 258–289; cf. p. 267 in particular.

[35] Such rites and ceremonies have been *de rigueur* at courts all over the world. For purposes of this work, we assume that later sources such as the *Bka'-gdams glegs bam*, the *Sba bzhed* traditions, and other early post-Imperial texts contain some accurate

artefacts about how Buddhist monks performed. If these are accurate representations of what took place, they were archived not to memorialize that time, but to serve as models for the future relationship between rulers and the Sangha. In Chapter Three, we will discuss some of these artefacts, as well as perhaps contemporary data in genuinely old documents.

[36] See M. Walter, "The significance of the term *ring lugs*: religion, administration, and the sacral presence of the Btsan-po".

[37] Convincing a monarch to support a teacher and his retinue was really the only valid token of that teacher's accomplishment in ancient India. This was a model for monks that constantly motivated them as they moved northwest out of India, and caused them, perhaps more than any other religious figures in Central Asia, to seek patronage at courts.

[38] This view may well have some validity for understanding early Buddhism in China. However, it also raises the question: What would have been the expectations and agendas of the first Tibetan Buddhists at the court of the Imperium? How did they work to accomodate Buddhism to their culture?

Wolfram Eberhard opined about how a "Bodhisattva ruler" would create a levelled society, and he saw this is a nearly universal element in Buddhist polity in Central Asia and China. At least as far as Tibet is concerned, this turns out to be an erroneous view; it also certainly seems not to have happened in some of the other cultures he cites. From p. 147f of his *A history of China*:

> …The Toba, together with many Chinese living in the Toba empire, were all captured by Buddhism, and especially by its shamanist element. One element in their preference of Buddhism was certainly the fact that Buddhism accepted all foreigners alike—both the Toba and the Chinese were 'foreign' converts to an essentially Indian religion; whereas the Confucianist Chinese always made the non-Chinese feel that in spite of all their attempts they were still 'barbarians' and that only real Chinese could be real Confucianists.
>
> [Second], it can be assumed that the Toba rulers by fostering Buddhism intended to break the power of the Chinese gentry. A few centuries later, Buddhism was accepted by the Tibetan kings to break the power of the native nobility, by the Japanese to break the power of a federation of noble clans, and still later by the Burmese kings for the same reason. Mahayana Buddhism, as an ideal, desired a society without clear-cut classes under one enlightened ruler; in such a society all believers could strive to attain the ultimate goal of salvation.

A generation later, views have changed somewhat. Something similar to what happened in Tibet can perhaps be observed for the Uyghur gentry; see this conclusion from Dorothy Wong's "Ethnicity and identity", p. 108: "The nomadic rulers initially supported Buddhism, both to create for themselves a cultural identity separate from the Chinese they conquered and to consolidate the power of the state. As Buddhism spread to the general populace, however, the religion proved more effective as a cohesive force in building a society that transcended cultural, ethnic, as well as social, differences." In Tibet, this process reached the fulfillment described here only during the Phyi Dar, but it cannot be denied that the btsan-pos used Buddhism also as a force for the unification of ethnies.

[39] The modern Tibetan term for the nobility is *sku drag*. It does not seem attested in Old Tibetan materials, and we are not certain what the specific term for "nobility" was during the Imperium. The best candidate is a term found infrequently in Old Tibetan materials, *ya rabs*. In later literature it usually refers to actions a person takes rather than his status, thus rendering "noble" more than "nobility" as a group, just as its opposite, *ma rabs*, often denotes ignoble action. The structure and nomenclature of the higher social levels at all periods is complex, more so the further back in time we go, and simply using the terms "aristocracy" and "nobility" also does not provide a precise picture of the Tibetan social situation at any point in time; here, as in most other works, these

terms are used as approximate functional equivalents. As the following passage shows, by the 16th century we find both generational (*rje'i gdung rabs*) and relative status (*ya rabs*) terms used. In modern times, a new "nobility" has arisen, the family of the Dalai Lamas; they are known as *yab bshis*. (On these see Peter, Prince of Greece & Denmark, *The aristocracy of Central Tibet*.) There still has not been a study that investigates what these levels of status mean to Tibetans in the context of their society.

Immediately following the passages in DPA'-BO.1985 which most likely are the productions of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's court (p. 376), we have this fascinating verse statement (p. 376), one which complements a quote from the *Sba bzhed* that follows shortly after: *de ltar Dam Chos rab tu rgyas mdzad nas / Dgung Blon Chen-po Mgos kyis gsol ba ltar // rje'i gdung rabs 'bangs kyi sa bcad dang / ya rabs rnams la phyag dang zhe sa'i tshul / gtam dang lo rgyus bzang po'i las thabs dang / pha mes dge dang yig tshang la sogs pa / ya rabs bzang po'i lugs kyis bstan bcos la / Bod 'bangs thams cad bkod de bde bar mdzad.* "According to that [edict], when the Saddharma had developed greatly (in space or function?), according to a request by Dgung Blon Chen-po Mgos, [Khri Srong Lde Brtsan] arranged and made happy all the subjects of Tibet with regard to the boundaries (*sa bcad*) of the nobility and the subjects, methods of showing reverence and honorific speech to the nobility, working methods for good discourse and the recitation of history [at court], ceremonies for the ancestors, badges of rank, etc., and a guidebook for the correct behavior of the nobility." Is this just a legend, or did Khri Srong actually attempt to revolutionize the life and customs of the Tibetan court and society? (For what it is worth, the Mgos clan did provide advisors to the court, but the title used here is not found in Old Tibetan documents.) We will study this passage in another context in the next chapter.

The methods by which people were elevated to higher status varied over time, and we must assume it was through service, especially military valor, as the example of the Tigers (n. 72) shows. Some have asserted that the *Chronicle* illustrates that *bran*, a sort of lower-class who could own land, could rise in status, but only one example can be found; cf. A. Róna Tas, "Social terms in the list of grants of the Tibetan Tun-huang Chronicle", p. 261ff. (That author's general, concluding comments about the strata of Tibetan society, infused as they are with a simplistic Marxian interpretation on p. 269, do not really help us understand the particular historical development and denouement of Tibet's system.)

Even for later periods, we really only have a comprehensive set of data for one area and its special system. It is *A Tibetan principality*, the classic study by C.W. Cassinelli & Robert R. Ekvall (Ithaca, NY, 1969); see pp. 80f and 214ff for the Sa-skya concept of "nobility". Another well-known study by Luciano Petech, *Aristocracy and government in Tibet, 1728–1959*, does not deal in detail with the mechanisms of the time whereby families were ennobled. A more recent study, *Commoners and nobles: hereditary divisions in Tibet*, by Heidi Fjeld, describes Lhasa's social divisions today, also without historical background. Data from these works show that many changes have taken place in both terminology and function, making a linear study difficult but necessary.

[40] Of course, the most prominent early example is Myang Ting-ne 'Dzin, subject of the Zhwa'i Lha Khang inscription. This temple, most likely built on Myang clan land, was a reward to a noble for lengthy service to the Btsan-pos, making it analogous to the Lhasa inscription for Stag Sgra Klu Khong. [RICHARDSON.H.1985.44] All prominent monks mentioned in Old Tibetan documents were of the nobility. [RICHARDSON.H.1985.45]. The *bran* "serving temples" were actually primarily serving the noble families and monks on whose lands they stood (A. Róna Tas, "Social terms in the list of grants of the Tibetan Tun-huang Chronicle", p. 261f, quoting the Lcang-bu inscription from the reign of Ral-pa-can). We have, conversely, no data on *bran* becoming monks during the Imperium.

Under the Sa-skya, noble status retained its traditional problematic relationship with rulers, but both types (*brgyud pa'i sku drag* and *drag btsan*) were subservient to the Khri Chen, a monastic officer and member of the 'Khon family. This demonstrates

a fundamental break with the power structures of earlier times (Cassinelli & Ekvall, *op. cit*., p. 214ff). At least in Western Tibet today, financial, landed, and noble status is not a determinant in who can be a monk (*Identity, ritual and state in Tibetan Buddhism* by M.A. Mills (London & New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 43).

[41] If we go by data in the *Chronicle* (e.g., A. Rona Tas, "Social terms in the list of grants of the Tibetan Tun-huang chronicle".AOH.5.1955.249–270) and in PT1089 (M. Lalou, "Revendications des fonctionnaires de Grand Tibet du VIIIe siècle". JA.243.1955.171–212) we see no distinction in the treatment accorded those in service to the Imperium as regards known religious affiliation.

This agrees with what we see in other Central Eurasian empires of the time. However, historically speaking, if we had to find a neighboring government from which the Tibetans might have learned how Buddhism could fit into their culture, it should have been the 'A-zha. First subjugated by Srong Btsan Sgam-po, then later occupied by Tibet, they are known to have been strongly Buddhist from a period long before the rise of the Tibetan Imperium (G. Molé, *The T'u-yü-hun from the Northern Wei to the time of the Five Dynasties*, Rome, 1970, pp. xxix–xxx). Unlike the cultures of the Newari, Khotanese, or Chinese, theirs was similar to the Tibetan, in the sense that it was a balance between pastoral and city-dwelling society (Molé, *op. cit*., p. 35; his interpretation of this, on p. 72f, is based on a clichéed view of traditional pastoral-nomadic society in Central Eurasia, for a view on which see n. 76 and 77 below). They would have been able to share attitudes, strategies, etc. Since the 'A-zha were also fervent Buddhists, and enamored of things Chinese, it is completely understandable that "Dbon 'A-zha Rje" is listed as the very first among those swearing to uphold Buddhism in the service of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan in the longer version of the Bsam-yas inscription found in DPA'-BO.1985.372. This makes it all the more regrettable that we know nothing about Buddhism at their court; we might find there a model that Khri Srong Lde Brtsan followed.

[42] This author, of course, is not the first to have noticed the similarity between the Scythian and Tibetan motifs of golden objects descending on Lha Tho-tho Ri's roof. R. Bleichsteiner (*Die Gelbe Kirche*. Wien: J. Belf, 1937, p. 60) remarks on the similarity and Hiltrud Linnenborn (*Die frühen Könige von Tibet und ihre Konstruktion in den religiösen Überlieferungen*, pp. 360–362) has interpreted it as it is found, embedded in Buddhist myths from the early Phyi Dar. Her assumptions of its origin there are unconvincing, however. She analyzes it as it is jumbled up with clichés from a variety of later Buddhist sources (including references to the *'ja' lus* or "rainbow body", on p. 361!) which have no relationship with the concept behind the event. The idea of teachings appearing from heaven, in a manner disconnected with Indic Buddhist values, is also an occasional motif in later Rnying-ma literature. See the *O-rgyan Rin-po-che'i bka' shog nam mkha' nas phebs pa* on columns 22–25 of *Bka' gsaṅ zab chos mkha' khyab raṅ grol las… ṅes ltuṅ druṅ nas 'byin pa*.

One can see several of the miracles Ms. Linnenborn includes (p. 361) from these later narratives in the IO370.5 document studied by Richardson as well—referred to above—which is an older source than those she cites. In order to explain the existence of the motif, she divorces it from the important fact that the gifts fall from "heaven", the term for which is *gnam*—which is the defining context also found in IO370.5. As discussed elsewhere here, *gnam* is originally connected in Old Tibetan sources with the ancestors of the btsan-pos; it is not a Buddhist paradise. One early attempt to connect *gnam* with a corresponding Buddhist meaning does occur in the most important document that shows the synthesis of non-Buddhist polity with Buddhist concepts, PT016. This document, from the reign of Ral-pa-can, cites *gnam* in two contexts. We encounter it alone and in the apposition *gnam sa*, with no apparent reference to Buddhist cosmology, at 25v2, 25v4 and its continuation, IO751.36r1 and v1. However, at 28r1 we find the perhaps unique phrase *Dga'-ldan gnam*. The Sangha which prepared this document decided to present Tuṣita in terms Ral-pa-can would be familiar with, the

'heaven' of his ancestors. However, later in the document Ral-pa-can himself prays for rebirth in Maitreya's paradise without referring to it with that phrase (in the last line of the text, SO751.41v4: *bla na myed pa'ï lha'ï yang lha Sangs-rgyas Bcom-ldan-'das Byams-pa 'ï 'khor du skye bar smon to*). We have here evidence of an effort, apparently not further pursued, whereby the abode of the ancestors of the btsan-pos would be equated with the Tuṣita Paradise of Maitreya.

As with many Old Tibetan terms in Imperial-period materials, the central point is not whether they later came to have value for Buddhists. Most clearly did. The question is, What older political context continued to lie behind them at that time, especially as related to the office of btsan-po? The unique narration of the descent of gifts from *gnam* requires us to look beyond occasional (much) later use of that term in Buddhist contexts. It is one of a number of motifs which is revealing about Tibetan religion and politics *per se*. Ms. Linnenborn's examination also does not deal with the significance of gold in these motifs; the relationship between gold and political leadership is significant, and is addressed several times in this work as well as in Appendix I.

[43] And which motif has often, perhaps rightly, been seen as a part of a larger set of areal beliefs connecting "mountain worship" with the (usually local or tribal) political power of the early Turks (with the wooded mountain Ötüken), the Mongols (with Chingis and Mt. Burqan Qaldun the classic example and perhaps model) and many others. It is also a prominent motif in the *gdung rabs* of many noble clans. Interestingly, in none of these latter is the motif connected, to its greater glory, with the descent of the ancestor of the btsan-pos, Gnya' Khri Btsan-po, even in comparison. It is worth noting that the analysis of the title Gnam Ri Slon Mtshan/Btsan in the *Chronicle* (DTH.106), which seems so redolent of symbolism, is, in fact, given there as a metaphor. We will further evaluate the concept of "mountain worship" at several places here.

[44] See his "On the Scythian...," *op. cit.*, p. 278. Lincoln uses the term *regiogony* for the form of myth which explains how the Scythian peoples came into being with their first king. This is not dissimilar from the point made in the openings of several of the inscriptions. It is also implicit in the motifs about the separation of *lha* and *mi*, the nobility and the general citizenry, described later in this chapter.

The inscriptions embody this concept. Most of them are divided into three parts, an *incipit* which describes the origin (to explain the rule) of the btsan-pos; the main body of the text, which contains the immediate occasion for the text to be created, and then a conclusion, which details how the text was created, who witnessed and swore oaths to uphold it, details about its copies, etc. Extensive *incipit*s can be seen in the 'Phyong Rgyas, Sad-na Legs tomb, and 821/822 Treaty inscriptions; in other cases (Lha-sa Zhol, Bsam-yas) incipits are absent (perhaps not to deflect from the praise of the subject of the inscription). In the Zhwa'i Lha Khang, Rkong-po, Skar Chung, Lcang-bu and Mtshur-phu inscriptions they are more or less truncated.

[45] Variations on this story do not affect its central message. It should be noted, and will be expanded upon below in discussing *lha*, that Tibetan political mythology acknowledges a variety of supernatural powers. Most are geographically proximate, and none rises to the level of cosmic significance or categorical distinction that approximates Western ideas about a *god*. In Indo-European mythologies everything from human emotions and shortcomings to universal power, fertility and other natural functions, and social ideals are modeled in anthropomorphic beings. Tibetan political mythology in the Imperium, on the other hand, is an isolated entity. It references only the majesty of rulership, the superior status of the btsan-pos and their ancestors, and the subservience of subjects. As clearly seen in the inscriptions, it does not pretend to explain their place in a greater system in any coherent manner, since even the apposition "heaven and earth" is not provided with a meaningful context. This also brings Tibetan mythology into a close relationship with Scythian and Turkic beliefs as they appear in the earliest surviving materials.

[46] This does not make a diachronic analysis of such motifs meaningful, however,

since—if this system, indeed, *has* "pre-Buddhist" elements—the narratives in such clan descent myths are suffused with Buddhist ideas. We should not otherwise assume that the myths, as we have them today, are of any great antiquity. Indeed, none are ancient compositions.

[47] See, e.g., "Race, win and please the gods: horse-race and yul lha worship in Dolpo" by Ch. Schicklgruber, *Tibetan mountain deities, their cults and representations* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1998), pp. 99–108; on p. 100: "…the population of Dolpo abstracts its categories of order (descent, heritage, claims to political leadership and patterns of residence) into religious beliefs". While everyone in the area of a *yul lha* may feel some relationship with its spirit, the strict hierarchy of Tibetan society seen in the Imperium still obtains in attitudes of closeness to these spirits, with the noble clans having a closer relationship, expressed in greater responsibility for the cultus. For an overview, one which is not chronologically precise, see S. Karmay, "The Tibetan cult of mountain deities and its political significance", *Reflections of the mountain*, pp. 59–75.

[48] See J.R. Kirkland, "The spirit of the mountain: myth and state in pre-Buddhist Tibet". *History of religions*.21.1981–1982.257–271, for listing of sources and variations.

[49] His *Tibetan painted scrolls* (Rome: Libreria della Stato, 1949), vol. 2, p. 737.

[50] The btsan-po was foremost a military leader, and most likely even a sort of Berserker. This is implicit in both the etymology of the title and the principal function as war-leader of a tribal confederation with his comitatus. He had to lead in war by example, at least in the early period of the Imperium. (For comparison, we have the very opening of an old, anonymous biography of Osman, founder of the Ottoman Dynasty: "Osman war ein großer Siegerheld, wo er auch hinging, fand er einen Weg. Nach allen Seiten schickte er ein Kriegsheer, damit es die Leute schlage und den Ungläubigen töte", as rendered by F. Giese in *Abhandlungen fur die Kunde des Morgenlandes*.17.1925.12.) This made the concept "btsan-po" unsuitable as a term for a Buddhist monarch, laying the ground for the expansion of the category "rgyal-po". For observations on this point, see Chapter Four.

The Tang historical records mention btsan-pos leading troops into battle and dying there. [XTS.95, JTS.11] This is, again, inherent in the etymology of *btsan* as well as in descriptions of *btsan* spirits, who might have provided the btsan-pos their fierceness in battle, as their *lha* provided political legitimacy. Frequent mention of the *dbu rmog* of the btsan-po being "firm" or "strong" indicates that military power was seated in it in some way. Today as well *btsan* spirits are seen to live within red rocks, suggestive of strength, violence and even death (red being the color of death for Tibetans). Is this connected with the old custom of Tibetans rubbing a red substance on their faces, perhaps a substitute for blood? [XTS.83] All such associations confirm the early Chinese descriptions of the Tibetans as a fierce, war-loving people.

"Wildness" was also the basis for a fundamental division in Tibetan society. Members of the armed forces were subsumed under the term *rgod*, indicating the unleashed "wildness" of the forces under their leader. Non-military population, on the other hand, were literally the "tame" (*g.yung*), i.e., subservient and even fearful of the *rgod*. (G. Uray, "A propos du tibétain *rgod-g-yuṅs*", *Etudes tibétaines dédiées à la memoire de Marcelle Lalou*, Paris, 1971, pp. 553–556, has a good discussion of their extended meanings.) This description of the warrior element is reminiscent of the Berserker-style warrior behavior of many early Indo-European peoples. As is so often the case in Tibetan categories, these terms found their way into religion, specifically in methods for the pacification of spirits (A. Heller, "An early Tibetan ritual: *Rkyal 'bud*", *Soundings in Tibetan civilization*, pp. 263–4). This is one of many indications that the spirit world of the Tibetans (as well as many other Central Eurasian peoples) paralleled that of the human. It is this world-view that necessitated the bivalent categories, with their terminology, discussed in the next chapter.

The other important color symbolism connected with the btsan-pos is gold, which was also strongly associated with the Scythian and other royalty. Gardīzī, writing in the 8th century, notes that the btsan-po wore a cuirass of light. (P. Martinez, "Gardīzī's two chapters on the Turks", AEMA.2.1982.109–217; see p. 129f) This was a cuirass of gold, already described in the *Fuguo zhuan*, which contains data for the sixth century. In some Tang sources they are called *jin hua* (金花), "gold flowers". Their likely origin is discussed in Chapter Two, note one. According to another early Chinese source, the btsan-po and clan chiefs also wore gold head-ornaments; cf. C.I. Beckwith, *A study of the early medieval Chinese, Latin, and Tibetan historical sources on pre-Imperial Tibet* (Ph.D. dissertation), Bloomington, IN, 1977, p. 139. For the connection between gold and leadership, see Chapter Four, n. 1, and especially Appendix I.

[51] There are clear indications in a chronological study of the inscriptions that this system developed over time. There is a development of the titles of the successors of Gnam Ri Slon Mtshan and Srong Btsan Sgam-po; details of the mythological narratives in the inscriptions also developed. What this means for changes in the concept of the btsan-po is uncertain. It also remains unknown what, if any, role Chinese concepts, as represented in its translation-vocabulary in the Tibetan inscriptions, may have had. *Pace* interpretations in several articles of R. Stein, who never showed why this process should mean anything beyond a presumed felt need by the Tibetans for them. We will discuss this point in the next chapter.

[52] When WALTER & BECKWITH.1997 was presented, it was with the hope of stimulating thinking in the area. The range and depth of influences should cause thoughtful students to consider the impact of Indo-European tribes on the political structure of early Tibet, and even further east. The more one considers the inability of the Sino-Tibetan and Tibeto-Burman linguistic relationship hypotheses to provide any real context for understanding early Tibetan culture (on which a few observations in Chapter Two), the more it becomes clear that we need to follow the influences and correspondences as we find them. Discussions involving Scythian and Germanic peoples, among others, aim at directing the discourse to what, in our current state of knowledge, seems the most fruitful avenue of investigation.

[53] This could well only apply to particular circumstances. Otherwise, history teaches—in the examples of the influential Nestorian wives at Mongol Courts and the Chinese wives at the Tibetan—that such rules need not be important when it came to the innermost members of the royal families themselves.

[54] See the rendering of the oathing ritual text in the *Chronicle* at D. Snellgrove and H. Richardson, *A cultural history of Tibet* (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1968), pp. 27–28. It may be inferred from it that different groups of officials took different oaths (cf. the next-to-last line). The oath, of course, doesn't explain its reason for being. The economic underpinning, involving the self-interest of the btsan-pos and tribal leaders, provided the rationale for its existence in the first place.

[55] As a practical consequence of the expansion of an empire, members of the nobility had to be rewarded, whether or not they had made significant contributions to its maintenance. The Mongol Qans routinely distributed large amounts ("opened his treasury" is an expression found often in sources) of their conquests to their retainers; cf. the chapter entitled, "How the Kaan rewarded the valour of his captains", rendered in *The travels of Marco Polo: the complete Yule-Cordier edition*, vol. 1, pp. 350ff; further examples are cited here. Cities and other conquered regions were other assets routinely parcelled out. The need for this, in part, as with the Tibetan conquests in Xinjiang, was the increased population density of the cities, suburbs, etc., in trade-route areas, which required more administrative officials and defensive forces.

As we shall see, the population of monks was also nearly or completely made up of members of noble families. The same question here may be asked of them: Were they the cream of the crop, or separable family members?

[56] Even the Mongol army, for example, was composed almost entirely of Turks, from which, of course, the Mongols were known as "Tartares". Although there were

too few ethnic Mongols to maintain control of their quickly expanding empire, the court remained a Mongol affair, with important decisions made, as always, at their *quriltai*. The Tibetan military and society, made of a similar confederation of nations, must have faced similar limitations, and what little data we have about Tibetan courts shows a distinction between the royal family and even the clans who had been married into it. The lack of official documents in languages other than Tibetan is also an indication of the insular nature of the Imperium.

[57] See the Tibetan version of a cup ceremony discussed in Chapter Three. Also, a close reading of the doings at the court of the Mongol Qans in the history of ʿAlā al-Dīn ʿAṭā Malik Juvainī reveals that the sons of Chingis had to swear an oath accepting Ögedei as their successor, as in 1191 the clan chiefs had to Chingis himself. [JUVAINI.182; read the oath made upon the acceptance of ruleship by Güyük Qan at RASHID AD-DIN.182.] After this, and the formalization of his appointment, those others in and close to court swore their own oaths. [JUVAINI.187] This was followed, significantly, by a symbolic distribution of wealth by Ögedei. Apparently, this was designed to create a bond with his court, for it was followed by a request that these officials provide food for offering to the "soul" of Chingis Qan. [RASHID AD-DIN.31; cf. JUVAINI.188f; for Güyük Qan's apportioning, see JUVAINI.254f.] By Juvainī's time, bureaucracy had deemed that such swearings should be committed to writing, *q.v.* p. 252. When reading Juvainī and Rashīd ad-Dīn, one should remember that references to swearing by "God" are references to Tengri, not Allāh, as at JUVAINI.187.

The "cup rite", a Central Eurasian court custom which was integrally connected with oathing, was a practice shared by the Kök Turk, Uyghur, Mongol, and Tibetan courts (discussed further in Chapter Three). We thus have a firm foundation to expect that further comparions of court rites will give us good information about the structure of alliances and loyalties throughout Central Eurasia. It is also among the best evidence we have that the Imperium fit solidly into a wider set of beliefs and practices.

[58] Let us look briefly at the onomastics of Old Tibetan documents. When we survey the names (really, titles) of the noble Tibetan functionaries in political, military and commercial documents, we find their elements are shared with those of the highest *blon po*s and even the btsan-pos. E.g., their titles are composed of elements such as *khri, btsan/brtsan, rgyal, gtsug*, etc. In other words, being (or joining) the nobility was reflected in receiving a title chosen from a distinctive and limited set of elements. This could be evidence of the method by which the court ennobled a person and perhaps his clan. Did this mean that it recognized in them a nature similar to theirs—a *lha*-ancestor, perhaps—which made them suitable for the noblility? It is hard to believe that such elevated terms did not also imply a raising of their religious status in society.

Beyond this, we should not make too much of such phrases. After all, the Kök Turk and Uyghur rulers also employed lengthy titles. Many of their elements seem to have had little meaning beyond wishing to include all sources of majesty and good fortune within them. Tibetan examples include Lha Bzang and Lha Lod. There also seems to have been a prophylactic value in some title elements. We will discuss the extended titulature of the btsan-pos in the next chapter.

[59] JTS.2–3; XTS.81. Exaggeration is not likely in these reports. Chinese chroniclers were most interested in describing the military threat a people posed, and what they said about Tibet describes the most militarily structured society on the Tang borders. Division of Tibet into "thousands" (*stong sde*—whether of men or households is not yet clear) gave the court a quick appraisal of man-power for military purposes, and guided clan leaders about how much of their population could be offered to the btsan-po when affiliating themselves to him while still leaving their holdings viable. (On these points see PT1287, and these studies by G. Uray: "Notes on a Tibetan military document from Tun-huang".AOH.12.1961.223–230, and "Notes on the thousand-districts of the Tibetan Empire in the first half of the ninth century".AOH.36.1982.545–548, and H. Uebach, "An 8th century list of thousand-districts in Ne'u Pandita's *History*",

Soundings in Tibetan civilization (New Delhi: Manohar, 1985), pp. 147–150. Further details about provisioning troops can now also be found in Brandon Dotson, "Divination and law in the Tibetan Empire", p. 57ff, citing the document IOL Tib J 740.

Early Central Eurasian societies were almost all organized by division into myriarchies and chiliarchies and so on. Clear examples include the Xiongnu, Turks, Khitans and Mongols.

[60] Again, it must not be forgotten that most likely all ethnically Tibetan monks in the Imperium came from noble clans. Hence, either they were consciously constructing a Buddhist meta-language to their liking, or they were simply, even unconsciously, using the vocabulary they felt most appropriate for their efforts. In either case, this was the important early period during which "Tibetan" Buddhism was born. Its birth was communicated in the many terms which reflected the religious and social values of two systems, a "normative" Buddhism—as understood by the translators—and the court religion. One of the most important such bivalent terms is *lha*, which we examine in the next chapter.

[61] A portion of this oathing rite follows.

PT1287.173–180 (= DTH.105):…*Btsan-po Slon Mtshan dang / Slon Kol mched gnyïs kyis / Myang Tse Sku dang / Dba'as Dbyïs Tshab dang / Dba'as Myes / Snang dang / Dba'as Pu Tshab dang / Mnon 'Dron-po dang / Tshes Pong Nag Seng drug /BRO STSAL BA'Ï tshig nï / Btsan-po Slon Btsan gyis / / bka' jï stsald pa bzhin myi nyan re* / gzhan sus bslus kyang nyan re bar BRO STSOL TO / / Myang Tseng Chung dang / Myang Mu Gseng dang / Tshes Pong na gu dang / Dba'as Myes Snang / Dba'as Pu Tshab rnams BRO LA GTHOGSO /…Btsan-po Khri Slon Btsan gyis / zhabs kyïs btsugs te / dmag khri dang chaste drangs so / /*

"As to the words offering the oath [to the six named here] by Gnam Ri Slon Mtshan and his (elder?) brother, Slon Kol, the two: Whatever order Btsan-po Slon Btsan gives, we will never not obey; even although anyone else entices (us), never will we obey (that one).' Myang Tseng Chung, Myang Mu Gseng, Tshes Pong Na Gu, Dba'as Myes Snang, and Dba'as Pu Tshab [then] belonged to the oath…(then) Btsan-po Khri Slon Btsan, on foot, possessed of an army of 10,000, attacked."

> *We can accept in general the interpretation of *re* given by the translators of DTH (p. 137) as = "never", but not as being related to *re skan*, "never". Apparently mislead by this equation, we have in BRDA DKROL: *re skan = mna' skyel ba'i tshig*, although the phrase does not occur in an Old Tibetan document. *re* by itself can only mean "never" if it means that, 1) As used with both positive and negative verbs; and, 2) If it means that because it is derived from a word which is not a particle, because of the line above: *nyan re bar bro stsol to*. Particles cannot take suffixes and then be put into a case. If anything, we might be dealing with an as yet unacknowledged verb, **re ba*.
>
> This verb would presumably mean "not to exist", and would be used in all instances in an imperative or injunctive mode: "may it not". Of course, **re ba* is not so understood yet.
>
> This discussion is continued in Chapter Three.

[62] Many studies have delved into the Indo-European history of the comitatus, including the Maruts in the Rig Veda, on which see Scott Littleton, *The new comparative mythology*, 3rd ed., Berkeley, 1982, p. 156f. He also discusses an early, classic study, Stig Wikander, *Der arische Männerbund* (Lund: Gleerupska Bokhandeln, 1937). On the Irish *fians*, see J.A. MacCullouch, *The religion of the ancient Celts* (London: Constable, 1991), p. 143f, although the author is unaware of their ultimate origin. We have among the Hittites one of the earliest-documented comitatus, the *pankus*, dating to the nineteenth century BCE; they were instrumental in the success of the Hittite conquests. As the leadership of a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual confederation, the *pankus* were similar to what the btsan-pos put together over two thousand years later. (On the *pankus*, see R. Drews, *The coming of the Greeks: Indo-European conquests in the Aegean and ancient Near East*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 68ff.

There is a sufficient data on the comitatus of some peoples that we can trace its adaptations over several centuries. Perhaps the best example of this can be found among the Germanic tribal confederations. Tacitus, in fact, first used the term *comitatus* in a brief description of the German war leader's elite corps, and the term and office were still used six centuries later, when Gregory of Tours showed how it had adapted to an urban environment. Comitatus members had by then been given cities to govern as a reward for their loyalty (cf. *Zehn Bücher Geschichte = Historiarum libri decem*, Berlin, 1956, v. 2, pp. 248, 254), and their office was no longer life-long (ibid., p. 254). The Mongols similarly spread administration of cities among the comitati (*nököd*) of the Qaghan. [JUVAINI.506] Conflict, of course, sometimes arose between rulers and their comitatus; see the story of one division of spoils among Clovis' warrior elite in Gregory as recounted in H.A. Myers, *Medieval kingship*, p. 82f.

An especially interesting essay on the role of the comitatus at various Germanic courts is that of H. Moisl, *Lordship and tradition in Barbarian Europe*. Reading this work thoughtfully, one is impressed with the parallels to be drawn with Tibetan culture. Western versions of the comitatus and oathing quite similar to the *Chronicle* account were known and even used literarily by Tolkien, on which see "Oaths and oath-breaking" by J.R. Holmes, in *Tolkien and the invention of myth: a reader* (Lexington, KE: University Press of Kentucky, 2004, pp. 249–261. J. Lindow has made the best study of the philology of IE terms relating to the comitatus in *Comitatus, individual and honor: studies in North Germanic institutional vocabulary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

This was not the only institution in early IE culture which has a close analogy to doings in the Imperium. We speak here of the "Tigers" and their leaders (Stag-po Rje), who were almost certainly Berserker-style warriors following their Berserker btsan-po. At least some became part of his *dku rgyal* or (inner) comitatus; cf. Stag-po Rje Myang mentioned in the *Chronicle*, n. 71 below; cf. n. 76.

[63] Evidence linking this institution with Turkic and Iranian courts in medieval Central Eurasia is presented in C.I. Beckwith, "Aspects of the early history of the Central Asian guard corps in Islam", *op. cit*. Important emic evidence is provided in the early paragraphs of *The Secret history of the Mongols*; these are their mythic (or, perhaps, historical) models for the formation of a comitatus in that society. In these, Chingis is the heroic warrior who honorably allies with him equally honorable "friends" (*nököd*) who are closer to him than anyone else. (An especially vivid example of the recitation of oaths which created his comitatus, as well as the oaths taken by his personal servants, can be found at SECRET HISTORY.¶123–126; at ¶164 we find an oath of military alliance that may also have created a comitatus-like relationship. I. de Rachewiltz discusses the term *nökör* on p. 396.) On later-period comitati see É. de la Vaissière, "Chākars d'Asie centrale: à propos d'ouvrages récents" (*Studia iranica*.34.2005.139–149) and P. Golden, "Some notes on the comitatus in Medieval Eurasia with special reference to the Khazars", *Russian history = Histoire russe*.28.153–170.) Even the *toneri* of Japan, ancestors of the Samurai, may have been inspired by an Indo-European comitatus model; cf. Scott Littleton, *The new comparative mythology*, p. 260; E. Oyler, *Swords, oaths, and prophetic visions* gives some details regarding the cultural particularities of oathing in the medieval Japanese situation.

Knighthood was the "Western" incarnation of the comitatus (see quote in the next note). This socio-political structure is, clearly, a key to understanding the underpinnings of many pre-modern European and Asian societies, including that of Tibet.

[64] In 2004 Christopher I. Beckwith delivered a paper, "The Silk Road and the nomad empires", at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. In it, he presented a way to look at the economics and politics (with their implications for religious values) of Eurasian states and empires in the Ancient to Early Medieval periods. To explain similarities in military cultures and political structures, he hypothesized that they resulted from an early spread, throughout much of Eurasia, of various Indo-European-speaking peoples. Conquest

by these peoples dispersed what he refers to as the Central Eurasian Culture Complex (CECC). Some of its features were: chariot technology and its use in war; other superior military technology; the comitatus; and, a war-leader (i.e., a 'chieftain' or 'lord') who builds political and military power through an intimate, dynamic relationship with his comitatus. Oathing was the principal means by which this and all other significant socio-political bonds were created and maintained. (The data in this paper is updated and expanded in the author's *Empires of the Silk Road: a history of Central Eurasia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, to appear shortly.)

The oathed bond between any comitatus and its leader was personal, not institutional. In its early form, when the leader died, the comitatus members died with him. (Over time, the impact of world religions such as Islam and Christianity—and presumably Buddhism—changed this system.) Later, with the death of the leader, the oaths among them dissolved. The Mongol qans clearly shared this custom, and the btsan-pos may well have; the inscriptions witness that every important re-alignment of power required a new oathing ceremony involving a number of *blon po*s and others.

However it was accomplished, the Tibetans, sometime before the creation of their empire, are placed by this evidence among those non-Indo-European peoples (or who are now considered so) of Asia who absorbed many features of the CECC. Since history is as much a monologue of the powerful as a diatribe of victors, what we can see of Indo-European influence has remained prominent, especially in the political realm. Tibet was in the cultural mainstream of pre-modern Eurasia, and provides a point of departure for the creation of a much-needed historical context for the development of the Imperium from a Tibetan confederation. There are obvious implications of this for religious studies. The courts of the btsan-pos were not different in many ways, in terms of attitudes and motivations, from those far away, and the points of commonality help us understand the place of religion there.

The economic, political, and religious significance of the CECC on the development of civilization in Eurasia can hardly be over-emphasized. At court after court and for centuries, in return for their oath of support to their lord, *comitati* enjoyed the highest status in society, and their lord, the ruler, was obliged, also by oath, to reward them with vast riches. Their provision was a primary motivation for war and conquest, and the formation of Western society: "Basically feudalism was derived from two distinct traditions—Roman and Germanic—involving personal and economic bonds. The personal element came from the late Roman practice of patronage, whereby an aristocrat surrounded himself with clients who served him while he in turn saw to their needs. A similar tradition was known among the Germans, whose leaders were attended by a circle of warriors called the *Gefolge* (*comitatus*). In both cases the bond between leader and follower was expressed through a personal oath of loyalty. When the fusion of cultures took place in the early Middle Ages, one institution passed over into the other, and the personal bond between a wealthy or powerful lord and his retainers became a fixed practice known as *vassalage* which was entered into by the ceremony of *homage*"—Carl Volz, *The Church of the Middle Ages*, p. 39. Are we likely to see something very different after the fall of the Imperium and the transition of Tibetan society under Buddhism?

[65] It is important to remember that Tibet was until modern times a part of Central Eurasia, not "East" Asia, as the many cultural connections discussed here show. If this is kept in mind, drawing similarities with e.g., Germanic societies is not at all far-fetched. It is generally understood that the Tibetans who first inhabited what came to be known as their plateau came from the northwest China borderland that had seen the invasion and crossing of many peoples, including various Indo-European groups such as the Tokharians and perhaps several Iranian waves. (More on this in note two of Chapter Two.)

Rudolf Simek wrote in *Early Germanic literature and culture* on an attitude which also holds for the Scythians (as far as we know), the Turks, the Mongols, as well as,

perhaps, early Tibetans: "Despite a late development toward more widely accepted and commonly venerated deities, the German religion never developed into a codified religion, nor did it ever possess a dogmatic set of rules or even truths to be accepted by every believer; the whole concept of membership in a religion was apparently foreign to it" (p. 83).

This helps explain why, in so many early states, when a world religion (Buddhism, Islam, Christianity) attracted the attention and support of a ruler and court, there was little resistance on the part of subjects, and few accommodations were necessary for its adoption. Resistance from other religious practitioners was mostly not organized. Aside from the autocratic nature of the decision of the court, the power of organized conversion and the spread of literacy (as in Tibet) often accompanied and aided this process.

[66] This tradition has, of course, continued until quite recently. We think here of the Chos Sgar Chen-po court of the Karma-pa hierarchs, which fit the traditional patterns of tent courts such as those used by the btsan-pos; see below for the traditional camp of the Dalai Lamas. The tradition of regarding the tent as a political center, a court (*pho brang*), continues until today, where the *sbra chen* is a term used for the *pho brang* (!) of a mandala.

[67] This term has been difficult to understand, principally because earlier studies did not attempt to place it within a context, especially as it occurs in the *Chronicle*.

Of these earlier studies, A. Rona-Tas comes closest to understanding it in his article, "Social terms in the list of grants of the Tibetan Tun-huang Chronicle", AOH.5.1955. On p. 263 and 269 he studies the *Chronicle* passages *dku la gthogs ste dku rgyal pa'i nang du gthogs so* and *dku' rgyal la gthogs so*. (These passages are dealt with in n. 67.) In these he interprets *dku* to mean "side", as it does in modern lexicons, so this is an appointment, a "belonging to", the "royal side", i.e., the aristocracy. This understanding is more precise, and preferable in other ways, to interpretations found in RICHARDSON.H.1985, p. 16f and the article of Philip Denwood, "Some rare words in Tibetan documents of the early period", pp. 130–132 (which is otherwise of value for citing numerous occurrences of the term in Old Tibetan materials).

So far, we have a relatively clear idea of the meaning of the phrase through its context. However, a precise definition for *dku*, and how it relates to *rgyal* [*ba*] remains problematic. BRDA DKROL.17 provides a better idea of the degree of intimacy it involves than other lexicons. The understanding of this term in the present work follows its older usage as "hip-bone" or "stomach", which is similar to its later meaning, "side of the body". This conveys better the close relationship between the btsan-po and his comitatus, which is a constant of their description in classical sources. Btsan Lha Ngag Dbang Tshul Khrims, author of the BRDA DKROL, often provides us with novel insights into Old Tibetan terms. He understands that the central meaning of the terms *dku rgyal* and *dku la* [*g*]*thogs pa* have to do with being oathed (*mna' 'brel*). Considering what we know about *dku*, we can say that the phrases must describe an oathing which brought tribal leaders into the closest service to the btsan-po. This is the classical definition of a *comitatus*. (A similar relationship inheres in the phrase *bka'* (or: *bka' chen po*) *la gtogs pa*, a later way of expressing an oathed relationship between a leader and his followers.)

One observation: The above phrases occur only in verifiably old Old Tibetan materials. Since we cannot identify a later form of the comitatus, we are free to speculate that this system was even then on the verge of being modified, had declined in importance, or had ceased to exist. Buddhist service at court could certainly have played a role in any of these, but the rapid expansion of the empire was probably sufficient by itself to strain its practicality.

[68] The *Chronicle* at DTH.106 illustrates a rather complex system, one in which there was a promotion from simply being in the comitatus, *dku*, to higher honor in a *dku rgyal*. (We remember here one Stag Stag-po Rje, whose title indicates that he was

both a "Tiger" himself, as well as commander of other "Tigers". Thus, he continued to carry an original designation as "Tiger" along with the title he later earned. See n. 72 and the reference to the Taube article there.) We need to bear in mind that this story, whether or not historically accurate, is also meant to serve as a model for correct warrior behavior and the btsan-po's required correct response, which—as has been pointed out above—was a principal purpose of this document. The agreement of the number of the original members of the comitatus with that given in XTS.81 confirms the accuracy of the account in the *Chronicle*.

We quote from PT1287.189–198 [= DTH.106]: *Myang Dba'as Mnon dang gsum gyis // Zïng-po Rje 'ï srid / Btsan-po Spu Rgyal gyi pyag du dngar to / de nas Gnam Ri Slon Mtshan gyïs pyag lcag gis // dras te / Myang Tseng Sku 'ï bya dga'ar / Mnyan 'Dzï Zung gi mkhar Sdur-ba dang / bran khyïm stong lnga brgya' stsal to / Dba'as Dbyi Tshab gyï bya dga'ar / Za Gad Gshen gyi yul sa dang / Mal Tro phyogs nas bran khyïm stong lnga brgya' stsal to / / Mnon 'Dron-po'i bya dga'ar / Kho-na 'ï Pu-nu Po Mnon la stsogs pa bran khyïm stong lnga brgya' stsal to / Tshes Pong Nag Seng gï bya dga'ar / 'On gyï Smon Mkhar nas / bran khyim sum brgya' stsal to /*

Myang Tseng Cung dang / pha spun po Mu Gseng gnyis gnyïs nï dku la / gthogs ste / dku rgyal pa 'i nang du yang gthogs so // Dba'as Dbyï Tshab kyi tsha bo / Stag-po Rje Myes Snang dang / Mang-po Rje pu tshab gnyïs dku' rgyal la gthogs so // Tshes Pong Nag Seng gï nu bo Na-gu dku' rgyal la gthogs so' / 'ung lta ste / Myang Dba'as Mthon [i.e., Mnon] *dang gsum / Tshes Pong Srin dang bzhis // glo ba nye nas / bran khyim mang po dang // yul ched po stsal to*.

"Myang, Dba'as and Mnon, the three, placed the dominion of Zing-po Rje into the hands of the Btsan-po, the Spu Rgyal. After that, Gnam Ri Slon Mtshan flogged him and, as a reward to Myang Tseng Sku, gave him Sdur-ba, the fort of Mnyan 'Dzi Zung, and fifteen hundred households of *bran*. As a reward to Dba'as Dbyi Tshab, he gave him the land of Za Gad Gshen and, from the area of Mal Tro, fifteen hundred households of *bran*. As a reward to Mnon 'Dron-po, he gave him Pu-nu and Po Mnon of Kho-na [following DTH translation and note], etc., and fifteen hundred households of *bran*. As a reward to Tshe Pong Nag Seng, he gave him three hundred households of *bran* from the Smon fort of 'On.

"Myang Tseng Cung and his male relative [or, brother] Mu Gseng, the two, both belonging to the comitatus, belonged also within the *dku rgyal pa*. The cousin-son of Dba'as Dbyi Tshab, Stag-po Rje Myas Snang, and the Mang-po Rje's representative (*phu tshab*), the two, belonged to the *dku rgyal pa*. Tshe Pong Nag Seng's younger brother, Na-gu, belonged to the *dku rgyal*. In like manner, because Myang, Dba'as and Mnon, the three—four with Tshes Pong Srin—having been loyal, were given many households of *bran* and large lands."

A general characteristic of the comitatus system is that the war-ruler rewards generously, especially with land-grants, those who served him with loyalty and valor. The btsan-po, as seems to have been the custom throughout the imperial period, would have given nearly all of his wealth, both recently gained and long-held, to them, thus providing them with great wealth, status, and a share of the empire.

[69] This is clear in what Richardson calls "The Lhasa Zhol *rdo rings*", commemorating the service of Stag Sgra Klu Khong, on which see RICHARDSON.H.1985, p. 1ff.

In Chapter Three, n. 47, we discuss texts such as the *Skye shi'i lo rgyus*, studied and translated by Y. Imaeda (PT220 and IO345), in which ideas about death and various post-mortem residences are already enmeshed in a Buddhist environment. We might find this disconcerting. However, we must remember that the Imperium originally seems to have had no organized religion, and later no religion other than Buddhism. Since the idea of an independent religion in an imperium seems to be a *contradictio in adiecto*, we should not be looking for Buddhism vs. some other religion, but rather Buddhism in relation to any other religious beliefs it felt necessary to put forward to achieve the best possible position at court. Note the mentions of *lha* in PT220 and

IO345. They need not be some translationese of *deva*; they can be understood to be a development of ancient *lha* concepts (see next chapter) incorporating Buddhist ideas in a continuing dynamic. In this process, "normative" Buddhist terms were matched in translations in ways that ameliorated, or supplemented, the meanings they previously had among the nobility at court (their "Tibetan", i.e., Imperial values).

As with many other Old Tibetan documents which were not mechanical translations of Indic or Chinese originals, these terms were meant to resonate with Tibetans at court, whether or not they had a profound understanding of the world being presented to them in these renderings. (Again, "either-or" thinking has often been projected into old documents by those who insist on that one characteristic which is usually not found in the traditional pre-modern world, for reasons explained several times here: Exclusivist thinking, the product of complete confidence in a single system to deal with all situations.)

[70] Such a belief system helps explain the motif in RASHID AD-DIN.31, wherein Ögedei commanded food be provided for the "soul" of Chingis Qan after his death, just before the sacrifice of noble young girls and horses for him. This constituted continuing the oath-connection between Chingis, his successor, and following generations. The ritual potlatch Ögedei called for before this rite was to cement the legality of the oaths between Chingis and his court. Thus, oathing could include deceased leaders, present rulers and the courts of both.

Chingis had become a "father" of his people, in a tradition reminiscent of the famous Herodotean passage, cited above, that the Scythians would defend the tombs of their "fathers". They must have felt that these tombs had great present value to them, that these ancestors (as Tibetan *myes rabs*) had a continuing interest in, and power over, current events. Special burial rites are important components of the CECC (see n. 63), and from the similarity of Scythian, Germanic and Tibetan customs we may also infer that, although dead, rulers and courts maintained some power in this world. (Turkic and Uyghur burial rites contained elements which are generally similar to the Tibetan, but their descriptions are much less complete; cf. C. Mackerras, *The Uighur empire, 744–840, according to the T'ang dynastic sources*, pp. 23–25 and 132.)

One way such connections were maintained was through annual and other regular sacrifices made at these tombs. There is no reason to believe the offering of food made to Chingis Qan's spirit was different in essence and purpose than those made atop the tombs of earlier btsan-pos. Of course, this begs the question: Why make offerings to corpses? Although their present bodies were abandoned, the spirits of these rulers continued to live, and to require sustenance. They would then be well-disposed to aid their living descendants.

R. Rolle describes vividly her version of Scythian beliefs about their "living dead" rulers under the topic, "The King is dead! The waggon journey to Gerrhus and the events of the fortieth day", pp. 27ff of *The world of the Scythians* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: The University of California Press), 1989. It is her interpretation that rites were performed later to secure continued help and support of their "dead" leaders. Such rites were also performed on the *bang so* (Tibetan equivalent of the Scythian *kurgan*s) of dead btsan-pos. [JTS.3] On these see also WALTER & BECKWITH.1997, p. 1041f; for those at the tombs of the Mongol qans, see JUVAINI.189 and reference. Since the publication of this 1997 article, Amy Heller has published the results of excavations at an 8th-century site of Dulan which show the interment of sacrificed horses (as well as other animals, and human beings—the comitatus?) at tombs there. See the web site/article, "Archeology of funeral rituals as revealed by Tibetan tombs of the 8th to 9th centuries" (*www.transoxiana.org/Eran*), p. 2. Horse sacrifice is also mentioned in relation to constructing tombs in the *Chronicle* (DTH.109 and translation at 144).

It is actually difficult to directly show the religious beliefs of the Scythians and Germans; much of what Rolle presents is extrapolated from Herodotus. He, like the authors of the Tang sources on the Tibetans, was not much interested in Scythian

religion. Nor was Tacitus in that of the Germans. However, in the Tibetan case, we have evidence of a continuity of beliefs which makes the above description quite plausible. These revolve around the concept of *lha*, the ancestral spirits of powerful leaders. During the Imperium, the nobility were both *lha* (representatives of ancestral spirits) in this life and *lha* (ancestral spirits themselves) upon death, providing the mechanism for continuity with living generations. This is exactly like the Chinese emperor (帝 di) during the Shang and maybe the early Zhou. Is it more reasonable to see here an isolated Chinese influence, or an earlier, common belief shared by both?

Compare the *Secret history of the Mongols* ¶201, where Chingis Qaghan speaks in a Thucididian manner of his special nature and his gift of being able to benefit generations after his death: "I shall become a prayer". Both the *Chronicle* and the *Secret history* are templates meant to explain details of the political culture of their respective courts and present something of their peoples' origins. They were also meant to provide models for the behavior of later generations as a commemoration of the acts of their leadership, done in accordance with traditional law (*yasa*, comparable to Old Tibetan *lugs*).

[71] For details of its contents and unearthing, see *inter alia* P. Lasko, *The kingdom of the Franks*, pp. 25ff, and B. Effros, *Merovingian mortuary archaeology and the making of the early Middle Ages* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2003), p. 29ff, 121f.

[72] Effros, *op. cit*., p. 121. Although the author asserts another reason for their interment (p. 122), the present analysis puts them into a broader historical and cultural context, one which includes, for example, the tombs of the Mongol Qaghans, before which were killed "all [their] best horses" (*The travels of Marco Polo: the complete Yule-Cordier edition*, London, 1929, vol. 1, p. 246). Tibetans also buried only cattle and horse heads at tombs, and the horses that the btsan-po rode. (C.I. Beckwith, "Aspects of the early history of the Central Asian guard corps in Islam", AEMA.4.1984.34.)

On horse sacrifice, see also nn. 23 and 73, and Chapter Three.

[73] XTS.130 tells us that the Tiger Warriors (see n. 65) had their own comitati, who were killed and interred with them in their specially-marked tombs. In the societies of the CECC we have been comparing here, any powerful, wealthy, or charismatic person who could afford to support a comitatus-like entourage, and wished to, could have. This was because the mechanism of the comitatus was the oath to death, with its promise of continued shared wealth and "upward mobility" for an individual and his descendents. Such a system may seem problematic for the authority of the btsan-po, but it provided him with layers of oathed warriors and a degree of military and social stability beyond institutions such as conscription.

The martial nature of Tibetan society is again reflected in its nomenclature. The title "Stag" (Tiger) to identify and further distinguish those who have served in an outstanding way in the military was also a venue for non-Tibetans to enter the upper levels of Tibetan society, and presumably its nobility. (M. Taube, in "Einige Namen und Titel in tibetischen Briefen der Berliner Turfan-Sammlung", pp. 496–501, compiled a list of those with Stag grade, including one Stag Stag-po Rje. As Taube points out on p. 499, some who held this rank certainly seem not to have been Tibetan.)

[74] This is also clear in the case of the Mongols. As may have happened with the Tibetans, warrior leaders and comitati eventually appropriated wealth even from Mongol commoners. Of course, this increased pressure on leaders to engage in even more frequent warfare. Khri Srong Lde Brtsan found a partial solution to this problem through relying on the Sangha, but as with the Mongols, more and more slaves and foreigners would have been brought in to fill military and administrative positions originally held by ethnic Tibetans. On the Mongol situation see Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal envoys to the Great Khans*, p. 65f.

[75] Extant Bon literature, including its dictionaries and historical texts, has not preserved a degree of knowledge of Imperial political doings or religious ideology—which could only be revealed to us by the use of the largely specialized, obscure terminology

found in Old Tibetan documents—in any way which convinces us of any position they may have had at the courts of the Imperium. This makes it highly unlikely that Bon-pos actually occupied the exhalted status they have long claimed to, or that they were even an important presence there for any period of time.

(This may explain why references to Bon-pos in truly early Old Tibetan sources are non-existent, and why even their participation in royal burial rites needs to be questioned, on which see Chapter Three. As far as anecdotal data goes, was the tiger-skin belted, bird-headdress wearing drum-beater at Ral-pa-can's court [XTS.130f] a Bon-po? If so, there doesn't seem to be much chance that they would have been at the same time literate and "rational" record keepers duly noting their service to btsan-pos for later generations. On the other hand, if they were the 'priests' in charge of funeral rites for the btsan-pos, performing what were, in effect, adaptations of ancient Indo-European royal burials, their successors almost certainly would have been those who provided the written documentation of these rites found at Dunhuang. Somehow, the idea of such ecstatic figures as described above duly recording orderly burial rites strikes a discordant note.)

We have recourse here to what are the oldest datable sources on religion in Tibet, composed at the same time as the Bsam-yas inscription. These are the full-text version of the Bsam-yas edict and Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's "history" of Buddhism, which was composed to accompany it. These have been preserved in Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag's history [DPA'-BO.1985.370–376]. In these, although Khri Srong several times makes note of religious practices he frowned upon or commanded to cease, "Bon" (or any other name of what might have been a religious system, except Buddhism) is simply not mentioned. Even if some of these practices were later somehow preserved in Bon materials—which is not now evidenced—it remains to be proved that there was a group at court who identified themselves as Bon-pos. More on this below.

In addition to the above reasons for scepticism, had Bon entered from Zhang Zhung when that area was conquered, it would have been as the religion of a conquered people, and this would not have given it much status. Indeed, it would likely have been viewed with suspicion at court, if it was allowed there at all.

For other reasons to be skeptical about an Imperial-period Bon tradition, see Appendix II.

[76] Herodotus (*op. cit.*, 306ff) tells of the city of Gelonus, some thirty furlongs (nine miles!) on a side. It had temples and homes, all built of wood. Only in urban centers such as these could the Scythians have created their famed metal finery and have stored enough food to sustain both their settled and mobile populations. Rolle gives a detailed description of a fortified area which might have been Gelonus. Indeed, its ramparts stretched for nearly twenty-one miles. It had separate forts, an area for markets, a variety of dwellings, places for foundries, pottery ovens, etc., on which see Rolle, *The world of the Scythians*, pp. 117ff. Perhaps most important, and most overlooked, would be the use of such settlements for trade, which is certainly how the Scythians obtained most of their wealth, despite the claims of Herodotus that "war and plunder are the sources of this people's livelihood" (*op. cit.*, p. 305), which matches Chinese *topoi* about Central Eurasian peoples, but which Soviet and Russian archaeology long ago cast into doubt when the wealth of their trade goods were discovered. (Other ancient Greek sources actually mention trade with the Scythians, mostly the selling of grain to the Greeks.) Telling tales of a foreign people's brutality and violence, as is common even today when discussing the Mongol conquests, made good propaganda and lore about these peoples, but the Steppe populations, almost always inferior in numbers to the settled peoples around them, usually hoped to avoid combat, and often did. The popularity and durability of such motifs come from the simple fact that even for a "historian" such as Herodotus these stories beat a dry exposition of economic history, which no ancient author, probably correctly, considered his readers would have much interest in.

Persistent clichés about the lack of "civilization" of Central Eurasian peoples have

centered on the idea of the itinerant nomad as homeless (i.e., "wandering the steppe"), pushing his herds in front of him. As far as we know, not a single people described as such lived this way. (For perhaps the only detailed, accurate description of "nomadizing" among the Mongols, see the illustrated article by Г. Эрдэнэжав (G. Erdenezhav), "Традиционные методы кочевников по исползованию пастбиш", pp. 333–340.) Cities were as significant for them as for us, and an integral part of the cultures of most. Weapons were forged and kept, trade products were created and stored, and food for the brutal steppe winters layed up in them. The idea of horse armies hauling forges, etc., with them is laughable, and archaeology shows that this work was done in fixed, long-term settlements, even as the leadership, with its armies, often bivouaced outside their walls, as we saw with the early description of the Tibetan court outside the walls of Lha-sa. (Today, also, Tibetans mostly "nomadize" in relation to a certain mountain; they consider this area their home, and don't just pick up and leave it.)

Recent thought is (finally!) breaking away from the earlier dichotomy of "sedentary" and "nomadic" civilizations (e.g., some points made in P. Golden, "Nomads and their sedentary neighbors in pre-Činggisid Eurasia", AEMA.7.1987–1991.41–81). We can go even further, however, and abandon the inaccurate simplification of the "nomad" in almost all ways that concept is generally understood. Central Eurasian societies, including that of the Tibetans, had much more in common with the "civilizations" that surrounded them than we have often allowed ourselves to believe. (One way to rethink such biases would be to classify, e.g., Chinese society as agrarian/mercantile, any number of Central Eurasian societies would have been agrarian/mercantile/pastoral, Siberian hunting/mercantile, at least in the Russian period but probably before, etc. This would help put us all on the same "playing-field" for study.)

The Tibetan Imperium was a diversified society, at least partly because of the variety of geography in which its clans and peoples dwelt. There was the fertile Gtsang-po river valley's agricultural element, the plains dwellers in the north and northeast, and the many valley dwellers. But, from the earliest period, these elements had intermingled, or had been intermingled by, the btsan-pos. Thus, Tibet was neither exclusively "pastoral nomadic" nor "agricultural", nor "urban", just as we find with the Turks, Mongols (Chingis originally came from hunter-gatherer stock), Khitan, or other groups. Much data on the complex nature of these peoples is available from Chinese sources, even as their historians felt obliged to follow *topoi* from the Han about the "homeless nomads". The latter relate that Tibetans built *cheng* or *mkhar*, fortresses or fortified cities, and the Tibetans evaluated the success of their military strategy by their ability to control the garrison cities of Xinjiang. And, although the Chinese criticized them for feeding their armies "on the hoof" [XTS.81], many armies occasionally had to resort to this.

[77] Cf. С.В. Киселев (S.V. Kiselev), et al., Дренемонгольские города, Moscow, 1965, p. 14ff. Archaeological data show a variety of urban settlements, some taken over from the Khitan and the Uyghur, others dating from Chinggis' reign and later. In other words, there is a consistent tradition of urbanization, by the Mongols and their predecessors, and it shows clearly their need for cities as hubs of society, trade and military organization. (The Khitan, whose empire was known as the Liao Dynasty, 907–1125, are portrayed in histories as building cities for two principal reasons: To house military equipment and to support cultivation with a stable, neighboring population.) The SECRET HISTORY.¶263, rather disingenuously, portrays Chingis Qan only as educating himself about "city ways" and including at his court those who were administering cities under his control. (This motif is due either to the historical and cultural distance of its author from this early period, or a later need to exaggerate the pastoral roots of the Mongols.)

The Tibetans also had their courts outside strategically-placed cities, or they were temporarily in cities—their courts moving throughout the year. They, the Mongols and others followed the great Central Eurasian tradition of building or using fortified cities as they needed them to support military campaigns—"garrison cities". All cities

in Central Eurasia were either garrison cities, or compound entrepots/depots; most were combinations of the three. One can think exclusively of military necessity here, but considering the importance of trade, a further explanation is that the presence of courts and the military served to defend and maximize their security and value. After all, healthy trade requires stability.

[78] We note in passing that these *topoi* play on a view of these peoples as irrational or motivated by what we might consider evil natures: Their greed for what we have, etc. We must look elsewhere for what guided their behaviour, because they needed to have a balanced relationship with their environment, and this can only come about through analysis and long-term thinking. Their success at this is revealed by their overall economic status, which includes the generally prosperous states of their courts as described in contemporary sources. (E.g., the Uyghur Turks, as noted by Tamīm ibn Baḥr, *op. cit.*, courts of the Mongol Qaghans, and the court of Ral-pa-can, described below. It is interesting to note that the same anecdotal sources—Willem de Rubruck, etc.—which have been used to justify clichés are quite enlightening about the general prosperity and diversity of these peoples' cultures.) If anything, cultural distance alone has created and maintained the negative views of the physical culture of these peoples. Ironically, many of these *topoi* still flourish in today's "academic" works; popular views follow them, not vice-versa.

[79] Two points about this sketch: A stockade made of spears bound with ropes also surrounded the Khitan Emperor's tent at WITTFOGEL.K.1949.133f. Also, is it possible that the Buddhist figure was only there because a peace treaty ritual was about to be held, as this description was provided by a member of the Chinese delegation there for that purpose? In any event, the existence of these two figures shows that, even if Ral-pa-can had been a devout Buddhist, he made use of other religious specialists at his court *at the same time*. This is perhaps the strongest evidence we have—certainly the only "objective"—about the psychological and functional subservience of the Sangha at Tibetan courts to the needs of the btsan-po.

[80] On the golden tent of the btsan-po, see the JTS and other Tang sources cited and translated in P. Demiéville, *Le concile de Lhasa*, p. 202. The only eye witness to the treaty rites during Ral-pa-can's reign also mentions his "tent of gold" (Imaeda.Y., "Rituel des traités…", *op. cit.*, p. 95) and that his throne was on a dais, where he was surrounded by his advisors.

Several details match with known characteristics of other courts in Central Asia in this approximate period, and all may be analyzed to be the result of the spread of sets of beliefs which might represent a confluence of two traditions. On this development, see Appendix I.

[81] We have discussed the significance of gold here, and its status at courts seems to have received a boost from developments within a relevent Buddhist doctrine: The idea of the Cakravartin. At some point this was conceived of as rule from a "golden center"—hence, again, the Mongolian *altan ordu* or "Golden Horde". We will discuss this confluence of symbolisms of symbolisms, and the resources which made such thinking likely at the time of the btsan-pos, in more detail at Chapter Four, n. 1, and especially in Appendix I.

[82] The two "classic" surveys of Tibetan civilization, Rolf Stein, *La civilization tibétaine* (Paris, 1962) and Snellgrove and Richardson, *A cultural history of Tibet* (New York and Washington, 1968), have described the Imperium largely in terms of values presented in later Tibetan tradition. Considering how much was lost in the transition between these worlds, such an approach is almost certainly going to minimize differences between them. There would seem no great harm in this. However, such a characterization does not give a clear picture of the unique nature of the earlier civilization. Nor does it illustrate that special approaches are necessary for the study of its religion. Finally, students are also not made aware of the historical bases for the massive inconsistencies between what Tibet's later "historical" Buddhist traditions say and what early data present.

[83] Despite the fact that most *rdo rings* remained known, they were not utilized to any degree by historians before the great Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag 'Phreng-ba (1504–1566), who wrote his chronicle using them as well as many documents kept at Bsam-yas which shortly afterward were destroyed by fire. Long before, 'Phags-pa Bla-ma Blo-gros Rgyal-mtshan (1235–1280) had access to some sort of précis of the *Annals*, from which he composed his brief *Bod kyi rgyal rabs*, contained in his *Chos Rgyal 'Phags-pa'i bka' 'bum* (Tokyo: Tôyô Bunko, 1968, p. 286) as a defense against Chinese skepticism about Tibet's imperial past. Even before this, passages from the *Chronicle* seem to have survived, and may have served as the inspiration for several motifs in the *Sba' bzhed* eulogizing the court of the btsan-pos. [SBA' BZHED.2000.97–99.] The author of the *Rgyal-po bka' thang* may have taken notice of the inscription at the tomb of Sad-na Legs. However, in any work but that of Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag, there is always the possibility that the author only knew of oral traditions or a stray motif from an inscription which he made use of.

These few examples aside, with the fall of the Imperium and the following social chaos, its paper materials were scattered, and most were destroyed. There was also a determined disinterest in these sources and their contents. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand why Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag, centuries later, was the first to examine the archives in Bsam-yas, or the first to examine and copy inscriptions into his history. Such a turning away created the cultural distance which allowed—indeed, encouraged—all the mythologizing later done about the btsan-pos, most of which is taken as historical fact today. Even more important: We have no evidence at all that the later traditions attempted to come to grips with the unique nature of Buddhism in the Imperium. Instead, Hwa-shang Mahayana became largely a symbolic figure, and the Bon tradition was made into a dramatic foil for what were portrayed as the vicissitudes of Buddhism. Where Buddhism in this period has been an integral part of a tradition, as among the Rnying-ma-pa, beginning after its fall, there is also no evidence of any research into understanding it, except as it could serve to glorify their tradition's founders.

[84] This passage occurs as a conclusion to Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's *chos 'byung*, a self-contained edict in which that ruler explains why he decided to accommodate Buddhist practices with those already at court. The document shows that he understood that this was a good beginning for establishing Buddhism, despite some resistance:

> DPA'-BO.1985.374 (variant reading in DPA'-BO.1962.Ja.110v1ff): *de nas dge ba'i bshes gnyen gyis bstangs te chos kyang gsan / yi ge yang spyan sngar brims nas / Sangs-rgyas kyi Chos spel* [*dpel*] *zhing mdzad par sgroms so / de na Bod kyi chos rnying pa ma lags la / sku lha gsol ba dang cho ga myi mthun pas / kun kyang ma legs su dogs te / la la ni sku la dmar yang dogs / la la ni chab srid gong gis kyang dogs / la la ni mi nad phyugs nad byung gis kyang dogs / la la ni mu ge langs bab kyis kyang dogs so.*
>
> Then, accompanied by a *kalyaṇamitra*, [the Btsan-po] also heard the Dharma. Texts were brought to his presence as well; [as an act for] propagating the Buddhadharma, [the Btsan-po ordered them] boxed to accomplish that. At this point, excepting the old Tibetan *chos*, all [other] rituals at all, because they were rituals not in accord with the *sku lha gsol ba* (q.v. Chapter Two, n. 48), were considered to be not good. Some were taken [to be] detrimental to the presence of the btsan-po (*sku*)*; some were also taken, along with the aforementioned, [to be] detrimental to the Imperium (*chab srid*); others were also taken [to be the basis for] human and animal illness; some were even taken [to be connected] with the occurrence of break-outs of famine.

This is an important passage, and will be further analyzed in Chapter Three. For another rendering, see W. South Coblin, "A reexamination of the second edict of Khri-srong-lde-btsan", p. 171. That translator renders *dogs* as "to be frightened". This certainly seems to make sense. *dogs* with the meaning I give above is based on a form from the verb *'dogs pa*, 'to connect things together'. Since these rites had supposedly been

performed for some long time, it does not seem likely that people would suddenly be afraid of their effects. The decision to replace them with those performed by a Sangha would more likely be based on accusations or innuendo about them.

For now, we note the phrase *Bod kyi chos rnying pa*. Does it refer to older Buddhist rituals, or to other older religious acts? The former meaning would be obvious, except that in Old Tibetan documents, *chos* does not always refer to Buddhism. For example, the phrase *chos tshul* can be found several times in PT220/IO345, translated by Yoshiro Imaeda in *Histoire du cycle de la naissance et de la mort* as an apparently non-Buddhist term in a non-Buddhist environment. Therefore, there is a chance this phrase refers to a set of some older, non-Buddhist religious practices which escaped his censure. Several times in the set of documents said to have been composed by Khri Srong Lde Brtsan in DPA'-BO.1985.370–376, he uses the phrase Sangs-rgyas kyi Chos; it is also found often in his inscriptions. This shows that *chos* was a term for a broad variety of religious acts, of which Sangs-rgyas kyi Chos was a special set. At some point, *chos* acquired its current, nearly exclusive reference to Buddhism. Of interest here also is the phrase *byang chub kyi phyogs kyi chos sum cu rtsa bdun* [DPA'-BO.1985.375], which, because the phrase mentions the famous "thirty-seven *chos* which apply to *bodhi*", also refers to religious conduct.

To muddy the waters further, we have Old Tibetan terms such as *lha chos* and *myi chos*, which do not occur in the oldest sources. Although also used by Buddhists, they probably didn't refer originally to abstract religious categories, but to a set of social standards reflecting personal status and practices (on which see the next chapter). Considering how important it is that we understand the early history of Buddhism in Tibet, it behooves us to distinguish as precisely as possible the various meanings of Old Tibetan *chos*. See, for example, in the next chapter, n. 47, the use of *chos* in important Imperial-period sources.

*DUNG DKAR.2002.239 interprets *sku la dmar yang dogs*, which is perhaps the only of these phrases to have survived into later tradition, as I have given it here. The reader is advised to compare the rendering of these passages with that in Giuseppe Tucci, *Tombs of the Tibetan kings*, p. 48 (translation) and p. 98 (text).

CHAPTER TWO

SKU, BLA, LHA, ETC.: THE LANGUAGE AND PHRASEOLOGY OF EARLY TIBETAN POLITICS AND RELIGION

Language, ethnicity, and the Sino-Tibetan 'Theory'

We have seen that the government of the Tibetan Imperium, its court religion and social structure, shared many characteristics with other nations that took part in the Central Eurasian Culture Complex (CECC, on which see Chapter One, n. 64). This provides us with a working context in which to understand much early Tibetan religio-political thinking. However, these are non-specific data, simply *because* they are shared with other peoples. Many of these beliefs and attitudes are truly ancient; they are prominent in Tibet's oldest writings and in Tang Dynasty source materials. However, we do not know which of these elements were present at the time of the formation of the Tibetan-speaking peoples, or early enough to be central to their organization, so whether we consider them "autochthonous" depends on our definition of that category. Nevertheless, we need to understand them, both because these beliefs were important during (and some even after) the Imperial period, and because they stand in contrast to a second category of data which we discuss in this chapter.

There are a number of avenues by which CECC institutions may have entered Tibetan society, and it was in all likelihood a process that consumed a long period of time, if the layers of loanwords from neighboring peoples are indicative of the complexity of the process. The oldest may have come from relatives of the earliest Indo-Europeans in East Asia, who arrived in the vicinity of northeastern Tibet about four thousand years ago. Later donors included most likely a Saka people (Northern Iranians related to the Scythians),[1] early Mongolic peoples (the Tuyuhun and Toba), Chinese, and perhaps other peoples in various combinations. How these traits entered is also problematic. They could have come in through conquest, contact influence, or both. Finding the most likely place for their earliest contact involves determining what areas were likely inhabited both by Tibetans or their precursors and early Indo-Europeans on the present-day China border. We know that

there was an Indo-European presence there very early; these groups inhabited territory which is also widely thought to have been the earliest homeland of the Proto-Tibetans.

This is an interesting and fertile field for study because, unlike much of the speculation about language relationships in East Asia, it is evident that much old Chinese and Tibetan vocabulary derives ultimately from Indo-European speaking peoples who left many cultural vestiges of their presence. That these linguistic and cultural characteristics are shared with early Indo-Europeans makes a strong case for the Proto-Tibetan and Proto-Chinese peoples having taken them from that common source when all these peoples occupied adjacent territory. This explains why the Tibetans and Chinese share some closely similar concepts in the area of religion and politics. Such similarities are easiest to understand if we consider that they were borrowed from a common source at some time in the distant past. However, the situation is complicated, and the data so far must be considered extremely tenuous. The Indo-European vocabulary in both Chinese and Tibetan comes from various periods and language stocks, indicating repeated contacts. For example, Old Tibetan *dmag* 'army, military' and *rmog* 'helmet' appear to derive from a root **meg-*, which could have come from any of several known Indo-European daughter families, from an unknown daughter family, or from Proto-Indo-European itself. The same applies to Old Tibetan *rigs*, 'lineage, to be right', which seems to derive from a root **reg-*, and its apparent zero-grade extended derivative *rgyal-* 'to be victorious; princely; royal'.[2]

Thinking about these problems strictly in terms of "peoples" or ethnies[3] may not be helpful, either. The earliest Tibetans show signs of having formed as the result of a complex relationship among smaller tribal confederations, similar to those of other CECC peoples as discussed in Chapter One. Looking for Tibet's "original" cultural values and religious beliefs seems somehow inconsistent with its polylingual and polyethnic basis. Not only would it be difficult to parse what we might see historically as "foreign" beliefs from some earlier, "native" layer, but searching with these categories in mind may lead us to distort the nature of the process we are trying to understand.

These complexities extend to the most direct evidence we have about early Tibetan religio-political thinking: its central terminology. This evidence is specific and emic, and represents what, given the caveats above, may be the closest thing we have to "unique" elements in Tibetan political religion. On a philological level, these terms cannot be directly

related to those of any peoples of Asia other than the Burmese. Even though the two languages are almost certainly divergently related, it is by no means certain that even what appears to be a core vocabulary has not been borrowed, as the putative 'Proto-Tibeto-Burman' numeral system certainly has been borrowed from a fairly late stage of Old Chinese, on which see the quote below by Roy Andrew Miller. These earliest Old Tibetan terms are important to study not only from a historical perspective, but because they form the core of Tibet's political and religious discourse down to the present time. They are the best evidence we have for the continuity—Tibet's well-known "conservatism"—of a core set of concepts which survived from the earliest period through the development of Tibetan Buddhism, i.e., from the Imperium throughout the period following, which is usually referred to, from the Buddhist point of view, as the Phyi Dar or 'Later Propagation of the Faith'.[4]

It is often assumed that these earliest beliefs must be "pre-Buddhist" concepts, or at least are devoid of any influence from that religion, as we find them used early in the Imperium. In fact, we really have no idea when Tibetans first became acquainted with Buddhism, and when it began affecting their political and religious thinking. The thoughtful reader will note in the nature of *sku* and some beliefs surrounding *lha* that they are not worlds apart from Buddhist conceptions, especially in its South Asian forms, even in their earliest uses. The forces behind the historical development of these terms must be understood in greater detail than this work has been able to accomplish in order to fully reconstruct the politics and religion of the Tibetans. All indications are that Tibetan ethnogenesis was a lengthy process, one that began outside of the Tibetan Plateau and only finished within it long after the Proto-Tibetans arrived there. Foreign influences and values must be assumed, not simply accepted as a possibility. The present work will concentrate on a core set of terms in the available emic sources; only some suggestions for pursuing points further will be given here.

Though terminology is perhaps most important, it is not our only source of information about early religious beliefs. Some mythological elements surrounding the btsan-pos, and some court rites, fit this category. (See Chapters Three and Four.) Since Tibetan ethnogenesis cannot be considered separately from the founding and course of the Imperium—indeed, the ethnogenesis of the people we know as 'Tibetans' may not have been completed even at the end of the Imperium—and from the opposition to it which came from within nascent Tibetan society,[5] this data must also be considered in a lengthy

dynamic involving the impact of these elements on the formation of Buddhism there.

The study of religion in Eurasia has long ago been enriched by the research of linguists and other philologists attempting to understand early Indo-European culture as well as the Proto-Indo-European language they were reconstructing. It seemed impossible to reconstruct one without the other. The work of prominent Indo-Europeanists such as Benveniste eventually drew the attention of scholars with specific interests in social structure, mythology, and other aspects of culture. Among these were specialists in religious studies, some of whom were able to demonstrate fairly conclusively, more or less purely on the basis of comparative linguistic data, that the Proto-Indo-Europeans had this or that particular religious or mythological idea. Historical-comparative linguistics has thus been able to tell us much about the early Indo-Europeans, and more is being discovered as the study of that ethnolinguistic group continues. The question that must be raised here is this: Can the same thing be done for the putative Tibeto-Burman family, or even the putative Sino-Tibetan family?

In our present state of knowledge, no one would propose that the Tibetan language is divergently related—i.e., related by descent from a common ancestor—to an Indo-European language. Certainly, lexical items alone create no firm foundation for any such claim. The current default position for those seeking to fit the Tibetan language into a larger context, which is always seen only as an attempt to relate Tibetan to other languages, is to consider Tibetan, Burmese, and Chinese (plus other languages) as belonging to one family of divergently-related languages, 'Sino-Tibetan'. We need to appraise the results of research based on this position, because it should have a direct impact on our understanding of early Tibetan religion. Previous efforts at historical linguistics have shown that peoples with close linguistic relationships—especially descent relationships—often (but not always) share close religious conceptions, mythological systems, etc. The Indo-European, Semitic, and Finno-Ugric language families share such items, and research in them has produced data which helps us understand better, or at least to better reconstruct, their early religious conceptions. If the linguistic research of those who believe Tibetan, Chinese, Burmese, etc., are related yields similar results, it will reinforce the value of that research. This, in turn, will become important supplemental evidence that we can use to hypothesize an earlier society in which the ances-

tors of these peoples lived together and shared religious and political beliefs.

In this regard, how has scholarship dealt with Tibet's religious terminology thus far? Actually, except for Buddhist vocabulary, it has not dealt with it at all. In general, the lexicon and semantics of Tibetan, as well as of Burmese, have been the domain of philologists and linguists with no real interest in religion. (This has been the case with the early study of most languages and language families as well.) Students of the area often still rely on vocabulary items from missionary lists and other amateur sources for the few religious terms cited for whole languages and dialects. Many old grammars have continued to be used because newer materials have not been created. It is mostly on the basis of such unreliable sources that comparands have been found to study lexical relationships among the various languages of the putative 'Tibeto-Burman' or 'Sino-Tibetan' family. If examination by competent and objective linguistic scholars shows that, despite these basic limitations, they have been able to make cogent statements or theories about the early religion and culture of these peoples, and that arguments have been soundly constructed about their relationships, then this data, though scanty, will have shown itself to be a valuable resource for understanding early Tibetan religion and culture.[6]

However, not only is the Sino-Tibetan 'theory' weak in this respect, even the Tibeto-Burman 'theory' suffers from severe shortcomings in diachronic data—primarily, basic, agreed-upon morphology and vocabulary for comparison—as well as in the thorough and logical examination of that data. Both stand in sharp contrast with the formation of the Indo-European theory. The creation of the latter was a synthesis of data which emerged from a long tradition of collecting and sifting data in various languages, mostly from written sources covering great periods of time. This collecting of data allowed deductive reasoning to take place. The initial observations of Sir William Jones and other founding scholars were that, because the best-known ancient Indo-European languages clearly shared the same basic morphophonological system, including much vocabulary, they were all related by divergence from some other language(s) that no longer exists. Taking this as a basis, much attention was then devoted to developing phonological rules or 'sound laws' that would govern the relationship among the attested languages. For this purpose, not only functional morphology but also the shared lexicon was of great help. Gradually, the similarities of these disparate languages emerged as their elements were "plugged into" a set of models of language affinities that took account of historical change

and, eventually, also convergence. The observations of Sir William Jones and others worked with contemporary experience "on the ground" to stimulate diachronic research. Thus was a relationship established which persuaded by both quantity and quality of data.

The two principal elements in the creation of the "Sino-Tibetan" theory also came, in part, from Western scholarly tradition (particularly *Encyclopédiste* thinking), but not from disciplined linguistic observation. Sino-Tibetanists originally tried to show that most languages in the neighborhood of China are divergently related to Chinese. Although some 'branches' have since been pruned, they continue to resolutely ignore the undoubted fact that all of those languages spoken in China or in contact with that culture (whether related to Chinese or not) must have been lexically and, perhaps, phonetically influenced by it, just as English has been by, e.g., Norse, Dutch, French and Spanish, all of which are Indo-European languages, as well as by other languages, particularly Arabic and Hebrew. Both the "Sino-Tibetan" and "Tibeto-Burman" theories were named after the peoples with the only large states and prominent literary languages in the "families", and no one has yet been able to establish a 'family tree' that makes any sense *linguistically* for either family.

The "Sino-Tibetan" theory was thus propounded without any tradition of the comprehensive and comparative study of the morphology, phonology, or syntax of the languages and dialects in question.[7] In other words, there is no good reason for even considering a divergent relationship, let alone being able to test it in the way the Semitic and Indo-European languages were tested. The most ancient levels of Chinese and Tibetan remain the most problematic, and in part because of the illogical assumptions for the study of this area they have been, and remain, the least studied and most difficult languages to approach. Understanding them well is crucial to formulating even tentative conclusions about their relationship, as well as being able to formulate their ancient geographic relationships to one another. There are other formidable obstacles to this study rarely discussed in the literature. On the one side, we possess as yet nothing like a comprehensive study of the Old Tibetan language. Many of its features, especially but not only its verbal morphology and the honorific system, must be understood well for both their linguistic and socio-political implications. Some basic points of syntax are still not well understood—phrase and clause construction sometimes differ from Classical Written Tibetan—and many phonological questions have not even been addressed. Without

good research into these points it is really impossible to evaluate anything beyond recognized lexical items and how they might relate to those in Burmese and Chinese. Unfortunately, this is precisely the problem—without further phonological work and internal reconstruction of both languages, it is almost impossible to confidently compare Tibetan words with Burmese words, not to speak of Chinese ones. In addition, there is a nearly 2000-year gap between the earliest Chinese and earliest Tibetan written sources. Without relatively secure reconstructions of Proto-Chinese, Proto-Tibetan, and Proto-Tibeto-Burman (if that is even a possibility), it is impossible to compare almost any of the elements of these languages with each other with any certainty, or to reconstruct the relationship among them.

Since solid 'Sino-Tibetan' foundations have not been, and perhaps cannot be, established, it is not surprising that those who support the theory simply assert that we should accept 'Sino-Tibetan'. No good reason has ever been given, other than that, well, the theory exists. Consider that nearly all Tibeto-Burman languages have SOV (subject-object-verb) syntax, meaning that if there was a Proto-Tibeto-Burmese language, it must have had SOV syntax. By contrast, Chinese has SVO syntax, and had it already in the earliest written form of the language, the Shang 'Oracle bone inscriptions', dated to about 3,300 years ago. These two groups are also radically different morphologically—and have been for a long time. Of course, we must also turn to a point well known in linguistics, that all the characteristics that have been asserted to "prove" that these languages belong to a single family can be explained more easily to be the result of either contact or areal features, which latter (by their definition) do not demonstrate, or even support, a divergent relationship. The most obvious starting point for understanding the historical relationships among peoples and their languages, one which works admirably when done correctly, is routinely ignored in 'Sino-Tibetan' studies, namely, spending the time and effort to identify loanwords, in order to isolate a provisional core vocabulary in each language which, by definition, would exclude all elements that were not inherited from the putative common ancestor. This has never been attempted by any 'Sino-Tibetanist', nor is the desirability (or even the possibility) of doing it acknowledged by them to have any value.

"Sino-Tibetan" has always struck me as a hypothesis looking for a reason to exist. It was first largely promoted (not surprisingly) by Sinologists, few of whom were competent linguists. In its worst moments it is the linguistic reflex of the Sinocentric view of East Asia

which Western historians of China, today even more so than Chinese scholars, have so long held: That all peoples in East Asia orbit China, and are dependent on her in some way—commercially, artistically, orthographically, or by being lesser lights in terms of civilization, which would include language history. (If one surveys even recent histories of East and Central Eurasia written by Sinologists, it can easily be seen how entrenched these ideas still are.) The non-scientific origins of the "Sino-Tibetan" hypothesis explain, to a great extent, why it was not—and still is not—based on a long-term, careful assemblage of linguistic data, including phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicography. It also was not based on the observations and intuition of scholars and travelers who had spent a long time in both culture areas, became fluent in Chinese and Tibetan, and thereby became overwhelmingly convinced of—or even intuitively inspired to believe in—the languages' close relationship.[8]

There is a Pole-star we need to keep fixed upon when dealing with the complexities of asserting divergent relationships among adjacent languages, and it has been admirably demonstrated to critique, e.g., the "Altaic theory", which sought to relate Turkic, Mongolian and Tungusic languages to a common ancestor, 'Proto-Altaic'. That basic truth is: Any feature, or set of features, of one language can be borrowed from, or influenced by, those in another. This includes syntactic features, phonological features, morphological elements, and lexical elements. All of the elements which so convinced some of the "Altaic theory" could have been the result of influence and areal phenomena: Agglutinative morphology; "vowel harmony"; a certain amount of shared vocabulary. Moreover, unlike Tibetan and Chinese, Turkic and Mongolian cultures share many common elements; this was believed to support the idea that the relationship of their languages reflected some earlier cultural unity. No amount of similarity in general categories can be counted on to provide fool-proof evidence for a simple divergent relationship. (This applies to several of the alternative schematizations used in the latest "Sino-Tibetan" studies, which are either simplistic Stammbaum models or are based on current geographic distribution, with little or no attempt to establish relationships among branches based on linguistic criteria.) We need to keep in mind, again, the kind of evidence that convinced earlier generations of the ancient interrelationship among, say, Russian, Greek and Sanskrit. There we all can see verbal and nominal paradigms with detailed correspondences in inflectional endings and other systemic similarities on several levels. We can also observe corresponding phonetic changes so regular that laws were

constructed which explained by numerous examples how languages now distant from each other share common derived vocabularies and similar structures for internal sound changes, word derivations, etc., which tended to be more similar to each other as one went into earlier stages of these languages.

All in all, it would be most difficult to conclusively show that Tibetan and Chinese were divergently related, even if we possessed much more solid data than we do. In fact, there may be more early Chinese loans in the "proto-Tibetan" language than had previously been thought.[9] Unfortunately, this is exactly the kind of evidence most scholars would take as proof not of a loan relationship but of a divergent or "genetic" relationship between the two languages. Do lexical elements, alone, prove anything about the relationships among languages? No.[10] Even sharing systematic and detailed sets of sound changes—the formulation of which was the greatest development in support of the Indo-European hypothesis—by themselves would not establish their relationship (though it would be strong circumstantial evidence). Of course, no such laws have been formulated and applied to Chinese and Tibetan. It is generally accepted, even by "Sino-Tibetan" supporters, that there are no regular correspondences. It is for that reason that James Matisoff, one of the leading proponents of the theory, created the "allofam"—essentially, a form in one language that is vaguely similar, phonetically, to a form with a similar meaning (or range of meanings) in another language. This is hardly what can be called scientific historical linguistics.

The fact is, after a rather low-level of analysis, most "Sino-Tibetan" supporters have simply decided to agree, on the basis of mutually inconsistent theories and reconstructions, that their point is proved. The entire affair smacks of the creation of a religion rather than a disciplined scholarly effort that becomes more refined, through criticism and re-analysis, as time passes.[11] Some who investigate the "Sino-Tibetan" hypothesis are kind in critiquing these efforts.[12] However, I am a religionist and, as such, something of a historian of culture. Thus, I note that, time and again, the "Indo-European theory", when thoughtfully applied, has revolutionized the study of *every religion* of the early Indo-European peoples. Can we say anything at all like this about the "Sino-Tibetan" hypothesis?

To date, I have found exactly one poorly thought out article on "Sino-Tibetan religion".[13] It attempts to identify a perhaps significant religious motif in early agrarian China,[14] but this motif has no known correspondence in Tibetan religious belief. Such efforts only emphasize the fact that early Tibetan and early Chinese cultures (which, again,

on the basis of historical evidence, began in different topographies and show continuously different lifestyles) vary so much that no amount of lexical comparison by itself would lead a thinking person to conceive of a common "Proto-Sino-Tibetan" culture. Again, the contrast with Indo-European studies, except in their most overwrought development, is clear.

An academic tradition may be referred to as effete when both its defenders and some of its detractors argue in a world of reconstructed forms that cannot be related to any known reality; when neither accepts any set of important data as a given, and argues constantly over interpreting it; and, when neither side is interested in the practical implications of proving or disproving it. The arguments over both "Sino-Tibetan" and "Tibeto-Burman" have never, and still cannot now, be said to have any import for the study of the intersection of early Tibetan, Chinese and Burmese cultures. At this point—and under this approach—neither has created convincing alternate realities for us that harmonize or separate the earliest Tibetan and Chinese data so that we get some idea of what a "Proto-Sino-Tibetan" or even "Proto-Tibeto-Burman" language and culture might have been like.

The best summing-up of the "Sino-Tibetan" theory appeared in a 1988 publication by Roy Andrew Miller, "The Sino-Tibetan hypothesis". Nothing much has changed since then. On page 518 we read:

> ... [G]iven the nature of both Tibetan and Chinese morphology, one can only be astonished that it has ever been suggested that these two languages—actually and more accurately, these two great language families—are genetically related. Nothing in the morphology of either language points in the direction of such a hypothesis. The syntactic structures of both are totally dissimilar; so also are their overall phonological patterns. We are left with the strong impression that mere geographical proximity, together with certain lingering adumbrations of the somewhat involved and generally rather special political relationship that has long existed between Tibet and China, are mainly at the basis of the formulation of this hypothesis, rather than any pure and simple linguistic considerations.
>
> ... in ST studies even the possibility of loans between Chinese and Tibetan has scarcely ever been entertained. The merest similarity in sound and sense between one word in Tibetan and another word in Chinese has typically been seized upon as evidence for genetic relationship, while the possibility of borrowing has remained virtually unexplored. Yet surely their long history of geographical proximity, along with the centuries of social, religious and political contacts between the Chinese and the Tibetans, would imply the existence of a considerable stock of lexical borrowings in both directions.

The important point he makes in the following pages is one even more relevant today. Those who support "Sino-Tibetan" are ever-more addicted to reconstructing from thin air "common Sino-Tibetan", *et al.*, forms which, in addition to being hypothetical (as all attempted proto-language reconstructions are), are created without attention to laws of phonetic change. They can do this, to their satisfaction, because the phonetic history of the proto-Tibetan, proto-Burmese, and especially proto-Chinese languages are all blank slates. The example he considers in most detail is the variety of initial consonant clusters in Tibetan, and how to harmonize them with the initial clusters in Chinese that nearly every linguist has reconstructed differently. The fact that syncope occurred in both languages actually makes it more likely that it is a shared areal feature; whether or not their vocabularies can be reconstructed so they can be related to each other is irrelevant. As a matter of fact, the more closely they resemble each other, the more this actually argues *against* a divergent relationship until the phonetic histories of the language families can be reconstructed with some accuracy.

The problem of linguistic relationship among these language families is not trivial. As stated above, theories about the nature of a people's religion and its relationship with those of other peoples has gone hand in hand with beliefs about linguistic affinities for quite some time. Even when there is a good basis for believing in linguistic divergence among peoples with similar beliefs, there is the possibility of over-emphasizing similarities or homogenizing features. Studies of religion and mythology among Indo-European peoples have exhibited this from time to time. Likewise, "Shamanism" is an artificial construction which was in part the result—both in the academy and in popular thinking—of a linguistic inquiry predisposed to consider, e.g., the Turks, Mongols and Manchu-Tungus peoples as closely related *ab origine* both linguistically and in terms of their religious beliefs and practices. What valid data should we expect to find in Chinese religion which will help us understand the religion of the Imperium, when their languages and cultures are, and have been in recorded history, so different? Since this work is the first to approach early Tibetan religion from a strictly historical point of view, all avenues of research should be evaluated for their usefulness. In view of the state of comparative-historical linguistics in the region, we must, for the time being, consider Tibetan language and culture to be (in linguistic terms) isolates. One advantage of this approach is that it re-orients the study of Buddhism among Tibetans away from simply

looking at putative Chinese and Indian influences, for these cannot answer the central questions about what internal mechanisms guided the development of its traditions.

As for comparing Tibetan data with Burmese, much of what was said *vis-à-vis* China is also applicable. Their civilizations are historically very different, and we again have no context in which to discuss whatever common religio-political value any shared vocabulary might have, since we also have no idea about what ancient Burmese religious conceptions were. A few studies cited here show that there is evidence for the relationship of the Tibetan and Burmese languages. In fact, although it is fairly clear that the two languages are related (as are several other languages believed to belong to the "Tibeto-Burman Family"), it must be pointed out that no one, including Paul Benedict (*Sino-Tibetan: a conspectus*, 1972) has asserted that all "Tibeto-Burmese" languages are related by divergence. Language affinity is rarely difficult to demonstrate among languages that openly *appear* to be divergently related, and this would undoubtedly be the case for Tibetan and Burmese, *but no one has yet bothered to actually demonstrate it*. This is not good news. It is not surprising, then, when viewing the work of Melford Spiro and the few others who have looked at Burmese religious beliefs, that one can see little evidence of anything that could lead to a major breakthrough which would find the religious beliefs of Tibetan peoples and Burmese peoples to be closely related. It is also not surprising that I have not been able to find a single work on "Tibeto-Burman" religion.

Tibet's honorific language

The honorific structures and vocabulary of Tibetan are distinctive elements of the language. They distinguish it from Chinese and Burmese and add a unique dimension to Tibet's politico-religious thinking. That this system was taken up into Buddhism in Tibet and became one of its defining features requires that we consider how and why it bridges the oldest and most modern periods.

Our information about the nobility comes from titles and titular phrases, brief passages in Old Tibetan documents, and the Tibetan language itself, its terminology and *façons-de-dire*, especially its honorific language. The latter has special categories for different beings, thus it is overt testimony about the hierarchical nature of Tibetan society and its religious dimensions. Indeed, it is its meta-language, the means of

expression of the authority of the Imperium, from and to the btsan-po, the court, and at least the leadership of the nobility (*ya rabs*, in the sense of a set of expected behaviors, as well as *lha rigs*, which expresses the special origin of the noble clans) who spent time there. It also presents them as beings substantially different from commoners (*mi rigs*).

Although linguists describe Tibet's honorific system in various ways, as a "linguistic categorization scheme", some variety of a "classifier system", or as a set of "deictic pronoun substitutes",[15] what has been consistently understood (from the beginning, by Kitamura) is that it marks the recognition of a hierarchy of social categories. Although many languages have honorific systems, that of the Tibetan language is unique because its social stratification goes so far as to involve body parts, personal property, and even abstract concepts related to the subject being respectfully spoken to. In other words, this system is centered on the hierarchy of a human community in which one group is to be acknowledged to have a separate and superior nature. It seems to have originated to distinguish and separate the power elite from its subjects, for the purpose of inculcating both privilege and absolute authority. Even an ontological difference can be inferred from the combination of its linguistic function with its religio-political application. These different sorts of beings have special post-mortem fates, shown both by the extensive burial rituals described elsewhere,[16] as well as by the description that btsan-pos went—more accurately, returned—to their place of origin above upon the death of the body. The phrase that occurs in the *Annals* to describe this process is *dgung du gshegs*. Since the inscriptions frequently maintain that the *lha* came from *gnam* to be "the lords of human beings", we are thus left to speculate on the relationship between *gnam* and *dgung*.[17] It is quite possible that, although the former is frequently rendered 'heaven', it may refer precisely to the place in the top of the sky (*dgung*) where the ancestral *lha* resided in their courts. At any rate, we need to elucidate the relationship between *gnam* and *dgung* before we can reconstruct the political mythology of the btsan-pos in detail. (We are not certain about the fate of the ordinary Tibetan subjects of the Imperium; some political implications of the *Skyes shi lo rgyus* are discussed below which relate to this topic.)

The nobility in Tibet had a separate nature. Since we know of no other set of commanding heavenly beings or gods in their early religious system, we may equate their *lha* with gods, at least functionally. (We will see the limitations in this equation below.) It would be helpful if we could find a people who had similar conceptions and also expressed

them in their language. This might help us identify the origins of the ideology of the Imperium. It seems that the early Indo-Europeans had similar conceptions:

> In the exercise of speech there is a widespread poetic tradition found in various IE stocks that recognizes a distinction between a higher or marked register of speech and a lower, unmarked form as one might, for example, find in NE *steed* versus the unmarked *horse*. This distinction is generally presented as a reflection of the differences between the language of gods and that of humans. It is found in the Old Norse Poetic *Edda* where in the *Alvissmol* we find that the earth is called *jorð* 'earth' by men but *fold* ('land') by the divine *Æsire* and there are a string of other such examples, e.g., (with the words used by humans/gods) *himinn*/*hlŷrnir* 'heaven', *mani*/*mŷlinn* 'moon', *sôl*/*sunna* 'sun'... In Old Indic, there are also traces of this practice to be found where the *Śatapatha-Brahmana* employs in opposition the unmarked *aśva* 'horse' with the divine *háya*... Thus Proto-Indo-Iranian **daivá-* 'god' (cf. OInd *devá-* 'god') has come to mean at first 'pre-Zoroastrian god' and then 'demon' or *karpan-*, originally 'priest', is in Avestan 'non-Zoroastrian priest' or 'priest to demons'."—*Encyclopedia of Indo-European culture*, ed. by J.P. Mallory and D.Q. Adams, p. 536.

This evidence only serves, at present, as an interesting parallel. There is no clear evidence in such examples of the application of these categories to society, which is at the heart of the Tibetan system, but the idea of a separate language for 'the gods' is indicative, as data below shows. This supports a connection between Indo-European ways of thinking about higher beings and the early religio-political structure of the Tibetans. Such a system could have entered the Tibetan world as a borrowing from a people they made contact with, which their political elite then used as a mechanism to mark their superiority. It could also be evidence of the intrusion of an ethnie which marked its domination by imposing this system.

It has been asserted—erroneously, it turns out—that Tibetan honorifics do not have cognates in other Tibeto-Burman languages, whereas ordinary Tibetan vocabulary does.[18] The problem is that we really cannot decide whether the presence of any lexical item in Tibetan and Burmese languages proves anything, because no criteria for identifying common proto-Tibeto-Burman vocabulary have been developed. In other words, when we look at the Old Tibetan lexicon, we are in no position to identify a common Tibeto-Burman vocabulary within it, because any lexical item found in one or even several Tibetan and Burmese languages might actually be a borrowing from one language or dialect into others. In fact, any of these items may themselves have been borrowed earlier

from some outside language. The inability to be more precise in such things, which affects "Sino-Tibetan" as well, is another result of failing to establish a clear picture of the phonology of the ancient Tibetan and Burmese languages, because only with this knowledge can common elements be distinguished from ancient loans.

The status of the honorific system in Tibetan must thus remain for now divorced from the question of Tibetan ethnogenesis itself, at least on the Tibetan Plateau, although these questions must eventually be answered. We should keep in mind that the efforts of the btsan-pos are the chief identifiable cause of Tibetan unity. They are to be credited with setting in motion the ever-expanding set of confederations which created the Imperium and laid the basis for the concept of being "Tibetan" as we understand it today. (This is not very different from what Chingis Qan accomplished.) We may even question whether what we know as the Tibetan language existed before the Imperium (think of "English" before and after the Normans), since honorific vocabulary seems to have been embedded in it from its very beginnings.

This system was not simply preserved by Buddhism in post-Imperial Tibet; it was further developed. Its terms, their fundamental meanings intact, were taken over, beginning with the early Phyi Dar Bka'-gdams-pa tradition. The system reached its highest development with the ascent of the Dge-lugs-pa tradition in the Lhasa area, where it served the same purpose as it had earlier—to cement the absolute authority and special status of a ruling elite.[19]

Below we discuss three important Old Tibetan religio-political terms, *sku*, *bla*, and *lha*. Only the first is formally from the honorific vocabulary. The others seem not to be honorifics *per se*, although they have been used as prefixing elements in certain situations. There was also a mythological justification for the office of btsan-po and the hierarchy of the Imperium, and *bla* and *lha* were its most important concepts from the earliest written language on. However, we do not learn much about their early significance in the political mythology of the Imperium by viewing them only within the system of honorifics. To understand these terms more fully, we need to look at them as political terminology as well as social markers.

The honorific system aside, there are other characteristics of the Old Tibetan language that might tell us something about the attitudes of the Imperium. One is that, until recently, the Tibetan language has shown an unusual resistance to accepting loanwords. Although Tibet grew

through the conquest and absorption of peoples from Zhang Zhung regions, Far Western and Far Eastern Tibet, etc., and also had extremely close relationships with Khotanese, Uyghurs, Chinese, Newars, and the ʼA-zha, only a few vocabulary items and calques from those languages can be identified in Old Tibetan documents—and, again, none of these is part of the core religio-political vocabulary. (Compare this with Turkic vocabulary in early Mongolian documents.) Whatever influence these peoples may have had in the religious history of the Imperium remains, from the point of view of language, virtually unknown.[20] This is interesting when one considers that the Tibetan court, at times most cosmopolitan in its expansive confidence, was openly interested in other cultures and beliefs. Perhaps the only accurate, and certainly most contemporary, representation we have of Srong Btsan Sgam-po's advisor, Mgar Stong Btsan Yul Zung, finds him dressed in Iranian style; arguably early representations of Srong Btsan Sgam-po have him dressed similarly (see n. 1 for reference). Those searching for Iranian influence on Tibetan civilization and court culture could concentrate on this period, but they will not find much, if any, linguistic evidence to help them. The same, again with a few exceptions, can be said to be the result of the known interest in things Chinese by Khri Srong Lde Brtsan.[21]

Resistance to loan words worked together with the general conservatism of written Tibetan to limit our insight into foreign influences. This is not unexpected, since the official documents of the Imperium represent an effort at the creation—and imposition—of a national language. Communication downwards through encapsulated titles and set phrases from, and representing, the court and aristocracy, was certainly a deliberate policy of the Imperium. This is best exemplified in the Old Tibetan Inscriptions, the "official" means of communication of the btsan-pos with their subjects. The style of these and other documents reveals a group maintaining a proud, vibrant empire as well, perhaps, as a government feeling insecure about the very idea of who is, and who is not, a "Tibetan" in its service. The need to offset this by creating and imposing a *lingua franca* with a self-contained political mythology and hierarchy of rulership is palpable in the inscriptions and some of the documents from Chinese Turkestan, where much of the letter-writing and official reporting is being done by non-Tibetans (to judge by their names), yet the language is usually quite comprehensible Tibetan. Local names for products, one or two titles, etc., can be found, but there is little else "local" in most of these documents.

The nature of the Old Tibetan language seems, logically, to reflect the essential political experience of the Imperium. It grew quickly, by stages, in spurts almost, absorbing peoples and areas and quickly applying administrative divisions and government to them, and then moving on. Their attitude toward dealing with captured and even allied populations seems unlike that of the Mongols who, in their ethnogenesis under Cinggis Qan, rapidly began using Turkic terms from the armies they commanded.[22] That nothing like this happened in the Imperium (to judge from written sources) implies that Tibetan leaders commanded Tibetan troops, while leaders from the 'A-zha, Khotan, etc., who knew Tibetan commanded theirs. If true, Tibet's language "policy" described here was, logically, also a social and political policy of exclusion due precisely to this rapid growth.

Srong Btsan Sgam-po and later btsan-pos spent much of their time and resources suppressing rebellions among the Zhang Zhung and other local rulers in what is now Tibet. Many peoples and regions—Tibetan and non-Tibetan—were only held within it by force. If the Imperium had assimilated these peoples, it could have made their political situation less secure, and the self-contained nature of the official Old Tibetan language hints at this. Perhaps assimilation was a difficult concept to fit into the rigid hierarchy the Imperium adhered to. The one constant value promoted in the Imperial inscriptions and elsewhere was the greatness of a lineage of charismatic military leaders descended from *gnam* 'heaven'. The insularity of this relationship explains the implicit language "policy" described here: The inscriptions, in particular, were meant for communication from that leader to those among the oathed: noble clans and the monks who belonged to them. The systems of oathing and the comitatus may have contributed to this, since the clans supporting the btsan-pos would likely have resisted having smaller and smaller slices of the pie as reward for their services at the same time that clans and peoples were constantly being added to the service of the Imperium.

An important feature common to some honorific terms (perhaps implicit in all of them) and other significant Old Tibetan religio-political language is what we may call *bivalence*. Certain verbs and nouns actually have two applications at the same time, because they refer to two levels of reality at once. In other words, we should not be guided in our enquiry into these terms by the assumption that one term = one individual concept or entity.

Honorific terms denote a special status and its nature, or function, in a generalized way (a "category"), of which the one referred to is one occurrence ("individual") of that principle. It is a way to link a transcendent politico-religious office with its current representative. Just as the President of the United States "represents" his office, so the leadership represented authority beyond their individual selves. (See below for how this is detailed according to Kantorowicz's theory.) There is often a corporate, religious dimension to authority which cannot be separated from a political and social function, and the Imperium seems to have been a good example of this sort of system. We cannot view its religious terminology separately from its political, the individual example from the spiritual power behind him. An example from neighboring cultures might again be instructive. It is clear that *Tengri* 'Heaven' in Turkic and Mongolian cultures, would not be looked upon as an individual, in Aristotelian terms, because Tengri was both individuated (ex.: *yol tngri, Qormuzda tengri*) as well as a generalized concept (*tngriner*, 'the Tengries'). In the sky but perhaps not of the sky, it also manifested as the force behind numerous natural phenomena and was pluralized to explain disparate powers of the universe. It supported the political power of tribal confederations and also manifested itself in the nature around them. Members of tribal confederations saw their leadership invested with this force when the universe seemed to be working with them to enrich and empower them. In the same way, we must not think that we can define and describe *sku*, *lha* and *bla* as unified, simple concepts. Other important terms in Old Tibetan documents, such as *chos* (see Chapter One, n. 84, and below) and perhaps *gtsug lag* (see Chapter Four), also show signs of being categorical terms, and thus have eluded attempts to give them specific definitions. Two honorific verbs discussed here, [*b*]*snyun*[*g*] and [*g*]*nong*[*s*], are also bivalent and complementary. (We will see why in Chapters Three and Four).

sku

During the Imperium, as now, Tibetan honorific vocabulary was made up of special verbs, nouns, and nominal compounds: a largely separate lexicon. Also then as now, it was referred to by Tibetans (at least by the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, d. 797) as *zhe sa*, which is usually rendered "respectful speech". It is a system that Khri Srong Lde Brtsan himself has been credited with somehow instituting, which may not

be literally correct, but the motif may reflect the sort of autonomy of ideas and policies under rulers who both inherit *gtsug lag* and create their own.[23] The most important honorific term reflecting the nexus of the nobility and the btsan-po is *sku*. (It is interesting that the oldest term for "nobility" or "aristocracy", *drag pa*, is both a martial term and has itself what seems an honorific form, *sku drag*, a post-Old Tibetan term, but one which illustrates a memory that the system originated in military fealty to its inspired warrior-leader, the btsan-po.)

sku is considered to be a common "Tibeto-Burman" lexical item with the meaning "body",[24] but this certainly does not fully explain its use in the Tibetan honorific system. It is both a substantive and a prefixed class marker, and its use as the latter remains special even today, in that it is used to create honorific expressions both for particular body parts as well as for the special nature of the honorized person as a whole.[25] In other words, it represents both the physical body of the person as well as its insubstantial qualities. If we can understand the meaning behind its use, we will see how the leadership wanted itself viewed, and how Buddhists at court factored this into their creation of a set of vocabulary correspondences which remain today as central Buddhist concepts.

During the Imperium, *sku* was a term which applied simultaneously to the physical presence (i.e., the body) of the btsan-po and, by extension and not metaphorically, the physical limits of the Imperium. This makes both the *sku* and the Imperium a "corporate" entity. In other words, as in many kingships, the btsan-po had a dual nature. His presence was as both an individualized entity and the state embodied as an extension, a hidden dimension, of him. It is as if "Btsan-po" and "Your Empire" (which is what "Your Imperial Majesty" really denotes) were enveloped in one and the same term. *sku* actually reveals to us how this was accomplished in Tibetan thinking. The btsan-po as a corporate being extended beyond his individual person to the inner circle of the court, as well as to all high-ranking nobility and representatives of the government (the *bla* as a corporate concept, below)—how far beyond that is not certain. (It is possible that the Imperium, as *sku*, extended as far as the authority of the btsan-po was recognized. On this idea, see the discussion of the *sku bla gsol ba* in 'A-zha territory, below.) Thus, we speak of the Tibetan Empire as an *imperium*. This is why many actions taken on behalf of the *sku* found in Old Tibetan documents were meant to benefit the Imperium as a whole, through the btsan-po. It is interesting, as noted in Chapter One, to recall that no phrase or

epithet was applied exclusively to the btsan-pos among the compound titles they bore. Terms such as *khri, lha, lde*, and even *brtsan/btsan* are found as elements in the names of other nobles in Old Tibetan documents. This tells us that, even given the special status of the btsan-po, the nobility and at least the higher members of the government had a special relationship with their leader within the *sku*, and that this was reflected publically in their titulature.

Such thinking is not as strange as it might seem, and is not at all alien to Western cultures. We may note the close parallels even within the Tudor Dynasty. In his classic study, *The King's two bodies*, Ernst Kantorowicz paints a picture of the dual nature of the king's presence, a subtle mixing of political and theological concepts that contemplate the mortal body of a ruler coexisting with one immortal, the latter the ruler's "mystical body" or "the politic body of the king". As in Tibet, the origins of this system are not clearly understood; perhaps each culture has had to grapple with how to justify kingship in religious terms—what Kantorowicz calls a "political theology".[26] One consequence of such theologizing is that by elevating a king's nature onto an occult level it can made compatible with, and glorified by, any religious system containing a concept to which it can be favorably compared. Christianity and Buddhism have supplied such concepts.

Tibet had a rather extensive vocabulary to describe this. Two of the most frequently found terms are *tshe ring* for time and *sku ring* for space. They applied to this abstract, occult person of the emperor.[27] We can appreciate these terms by noting the essentially verbal nature of the word *ring*(*s*) as meaning "extend(ed)". It is closely related to the past tense of a verb which is attested in Old Tibetan phrases such as *rdo rings*, an "extended" or "lengthened" stone. Likewise, when *sku* is used as an honorific qualifier, it often designates that whatever gift (*sku yon*), purpose (*sku don*) etc., is mentioned belongs to, or emanates from, this greater "person" of the btsan-po, whether or not he was physically involved, or perhaps even aware of, the process—"l'Etat, c'est moi", as it were, again following the traditional concept of majesty. On this level, the life and administration of the Imperium took place within the *sku* (and there is only one *sku*), which again was elastic, insofar as expansion, *viz*. by military success, increased it, both spatially and in its power; it could also be reduced, as we see below. Logically, then, the *sku* is coterminous with the *chab srid*, the imperial holdings defined as an area dominated by conquest through the btsan-po's "majesty". (The Old Tibetan phrase *sku dang chab srid* illustrates the partition of

the concepts, as in the Lho Brag inscription at LI & COBLIN.355; the latter was entrusted to the former when the btsan-po's *sku* had matured and the *chab srid* was able to "fit in", so to speak, as in the Zhwa'i Lha Khang inscription at RICHARDSON.H.1985.46. In addition to these and other more abstract terms, such as *sku yon*, there are the well-known *sku srungs*, the bodyguard of the btsan-pos, and even *sku gdung*, which marries the concept of a greater self with the physical body and gives it a hereditary and social—and religious—dimension.

Because the imperial mythology in the Old Tibetan documents is largely non-referential, this ideology must, for the most part, be inferred from phrases and brief statements. However, this interpretation makes sense of the otherwise various uses of *sku* and its compounds, and helps explain how they could have religious and political content at the same time. It is also confirmed by the uses to which Tibetans have consistently put this term, as revealed by present-day anthropological enquiry in the use of *sku, bla* and *lha*, on which below. Its meaning as a Buddhist translation term for the presence of a spiritual(-ized) being in a position of combined religious and political authority is a use completely consistent with this, as is made clear throughout this work.[28]

The realization of the "mystic body" of the btsan-po is clearly exemplified in the phrase *sku la snyung/snyun*.[29] This phrase has usually been rendered, "for a [btsan-po] to become ill". However, its literal meaning is, "there is a diminution/lessening of the *sku*".[30] *snyung/snyun* as a verb seems always to have primarily meant, "to be made less; to reduce, diminish".[31] It remains the honorific verb for "to be ill; sick", just as *snyung* is the honorific form of *nad*, "illness". The concept behind this expression is that, when healthy and powerful, the btsan-po's body (and by extension the "health" or "soundness" of the Imperium)—his *sku*—is considered to be great in extent, and strong. However, when a btsan-po has been afflicted physically (by an illness) or mentally (as the actions of evil spirits such as *gdon* on the *thugs*), both his physical and corporate bodies could be damaged and then diminished. Although the external manifestation would have been an illness, to put the causality in order, an illness befalling the btsan-po was a sign of an attack upon him and the Imperium, putting both at risk. One telling use of the phrase *sku la snyun* in Old Tibetan documents actually comes from a Buddhist text. Here words are placed in the mouth of Ral-pa-can concerning the virtue of putting himself in the hands of monks who will constantly pray for his welfare. Through their efforts, *sku tshe g.yung drung du bzhes te / sku la snyun mi mnga'*, that is, he will enjoy eternal

life, and the *sku*—both himself and the Imperium—will not be subject to diminution (through illness, etc.; at PT016.34a.1–2; cf. n. 30). This understanding of the nature of *sku* survived the fall of the Imperium, as we see in an interesting narrative in the MA ṆI BKA' 'BUM [695r], an early Phyi Dar compilation which helped both to develop the cult of Avalokiteśvara in post-Imperial Tibet as well as to lay out a place for rulers in a world where monks ruled at their courts.[32] In this story, Srong Btsan Sgam-po, the model for such rulers, is described as normally having a body (and empire?) so vast (*sku shin tu che ba*) that Avalokiteśvara and Vairocana could sit on his shoulders. Then, due to the nefarious acts of some of his ministers, he undergoes "shrinking" (*bsnyung*), until he is gradually reduced to the size people normally see him to be; by the time he dies, only his *pur* remains behind.[33] These are two passages which help explain how *sku* was used by monks who understood its political meaning and transformed it from a "pre-Buddhist" political term to its use as a calque for Sanskrit *kāya*. The sense of the term is wonderfully preserved, since in Buddhist thinking it had an analogous meaning, which again functioned on more than one level: *sku/kāya* as magnificent presence, as well as its function in compounds such as *nirmāṇakāya*.[34]

Thus, the "occult" dimension of the btsan-po made it easier for monks at court to adapt this idea to Buddhist concepts, to the greater glory of both. The PT016 passage above shows that this was, in fact, accomplished. One can equally well imagine that Srong Btsan Sgam-po was equated with Avalokiteśvara—or even other Buddhist spiritual beings, for that matter—on a similar, "occult" level (see Chapter Four) that might leave little physical evidence behind, since it was centered at court, and neither functionaries nor monks would have made this cultus public, for at least two reasons. One was the issue of security, discussed in Chapter One. The second was that Buddhism was not yet widely known among the populace; thus, asserting that the btsan-po was also a Bodhisattva might not have meant much to them. When we read claims to the contrary about Srong Btsan Sgam-po, we should take into account that there is nothing conclusive to be said on either side of the question, but evidence continues to mount that he was involved with Buddhism at his court.[35] Of course, the tradition of Tibetan Buddhists has always been clear on this, and such unanimity might well be significant.

sku bla

The most important religio-political agents in whose care the Imperium rested, aside from the btsan-pos, seems to have been an obscure group known as the *sku bla*.[36] This term has never been described, either as it occurs in authoritative, contemporary or near-contemporary sources, nor in Phyi Dar documents or translation literature. The definitions in dictionaries are not reliable, for reasons we will discuss. Those who have written on it have described the concept as representing an "ancestral deity", "patron spirit", or "tutelary spirit", without further explanation. In fact, if we could simply define it, we might understand it. Problems include that *sku* might or might not be an honorific prefix. If it were, it would be a reference to "the Imperium"[37] of the btsan-po in the most elevated terms. If it were an apposition, we might assume that it was a governmental group (*bla* meaning government) whose function related to the *sku* of the btsan-po and the government. A third alternative would be that it is a scoped possessive compound, "the *bla* of the *sku*". All possibilities circle around the same concept: That it was a government entity relating to the "corporate body" of the Btsan-po. No matter how we resolve this phrase, we at least can be sure that it brings the concepts of *sku* and *bla* together.

Can we get a clearer understanding of this term? The most logical context in which to discuss it would be the politics and religion of the Imperium. There is evidence—the only clear evidence we have—that they served the government, as individuals and as a group, often outside of Tibet proper. That they were seen as part of the government apparatus is clear from the official documents, mostly quite minor, which are cited below. They are also prominent in prognostic processes described in old, but post-Imperial, texts. This means that they are asserted to have shared characteristics of being both government agents and independent spiritual powers. (In essence, and in application of the concept of bivalence, this is also what the btsan-pos were, both earthly rulers and the living representatives of their ancestral spiritual beings, now powerful supports for them and indivisible from them, as the term *lha btsan po* shows, and as we will describe below. Thus, there is no compelling reason to believe they were not human beings who were at the same time representatives of powerful spiritual beings. If this is the case, they would have been linked to the btsan-po and the court through an oathing process, one which brought their spiritual being-protectors into some relationship with the ancestral spiritual beings of

the btsan-pos.[38] (This also seems to have been the function of the *lha bdag*, who were human beings representing spiritual beings, and who are mentioned in the Rkong-po inscription in the same context as the Sku Bla, q.v. below.)

It is important that we elucidate the earliest occurrences of Sku Bla and let them guide us. This is the most important politico-religious term whose meaning did not survive the fall of the Imperium. Not only did the term not survive; until today there is no religious office in Tibet which seems at all similar to it. One could speculate that one or another "oracle"—e.g., at Gnas Chung—or "medium" may be in some way their descendants. Appearances argue, however, that these oracles more likely continue some functions of the btsan-pos. (One can, e.g., find an example of the *dbu rmog*, a ritual "crown" that accompanied certain Dge-lugs-pa oracles, at *www.museeguimet.fr*. Connections between oracles, female lines, and spirits of the dead who have departed to mountains—a situation which has been asserted for the btsan-pos—can also be found. On this, see Hildegard Diemberger, "Lhakama [*lha-bka'-ma*] and khandroma [*mkha'-'gro-ma*]..." (*Tibetan history and language*. Wien: Arbeitskreis für tibetische und buddhistische Studien, 1991, pp. 137–153).

Speculation about their religious nature aside, it is interesting that all the citations below occur in political, and not overtly religious, contexts. The first sources we cite are generally agreed to refer to events which predate the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, although the documents themselves may not have been composed that early.

Food was gathered and prepared for the Sku Bla seasonally [TLTD.8ff] when they arrived at one of the Imperium's holdings, hence the phrase *sku bla [ched po] gsol ba* found often in documents from the 'A-zha and Shazhou areas of Chinese Turkestan. There is no instance in these documents of a *sku bla gsol ba* in Tibet proper. Even what may be the earliest citation, in the Rkong-po inscription, relates to what was, at that time, a semi-independent area; this is contra "Une lecture...", p. 305. In PT1569 there is even reference to *yul sha cu'i sku bla thams cad*, referring to the Shazhou area of Chinese Turkestan. (Only in later Old Tibetan literature, it seems, do we have references to the Sku Bla within Tibet. In these later sources, mostly Bon texts, we find a vague knowledge of the importance of this office in the Imperium, and it is used to strengthen claims about the presence and importance of Bon-pos at the courts of the btsan-pos.) Unfortunately, if one examines in detail the data about the Sku Bla in these two sources, no continuous,

fixed tradition surfaces. We will discuss this in more detail below in connection with Tibet's "mountain cult", which is also examined in Chapter Four.

In the oldest documents, it was considered important to specify the exact time of the gathering of the Sku Bla: On either the first day of the first month of a season or during that first month, and once on the eleventh day of an unknown month. Twice it is specified that this is to take place at a *pho brang* or local "court", and once (TLTD.415 = OTMET.2.#175.) there is reference to convening it in a market or small town. There is nothing here necessarily pointing to a religious offering or feast; *gsol ba* is simply the honorific form of the verb "to eat", as well as to make an offering. (Since it is honorific, it is also political, of course, and is used in Old Tibetan documents both in the meaning of "request", usually with a *la* postposition to the one being requested; *gsol ba* is also used for the administration of food or medicine to the *sku* of btsan-pos, etc.) Whether these rites were fundamentally political or religious, it is highly likely that offering food to them was done in a ritual setting which honored them as representatives of the Imperium and/or the spiritual beings whose presence they represented.

We must emphasize, again, that these passages are in secular documents (some are simply minor requisition notices) which are locally-produced epistles and reports devoid of mythic, ritual or religious context or reference. In these documents, the Sku Bla are mentioned matter-of-factly, with no sense of religious awe or the usual prefixed honorifics given even to mid-level bureaucrats of whom some request is being made. At TLTD.387 we find a probable mention of provisioning radishes for the *sku bla gsol ba*. One is hard-pressed to consider radishes suitable offerings for spiritual beings.[39] At TLTD.2.381 we have another list of gifts prepared by blon-po or advisors for (visiting) Sku Bla. Again, it is a secular document, representing the sort of gift exchange commonly found in TLTD in return for preparation (*sbyor ba la*, line 2) of gifts made which "opened the eyes", i.e., got the attention, of the Sku Bla (*sku bla spyan dbye' ba'i*) when they visited. TLTD.354 seems to mention that a Sku Bla has been dispatched to a particular location, 'Greng Ro (Thomas understood that *sku bla* here referred to a human being). Finally, OTMET.#375 mentions a *gsol ba* of a *sku bla' phang ldang ma*, presumably by local officials. Phang-dang-ma was an actual place, cited at DTH.151 with reference to the reign of Mes Ag Tshom. This member of the Sku Bla was located there. As with the quote from the Skar Chung inscription below, an air of reality surrounds

most occurrences of this term. To understand what the Sku Bla may have been, we face the challenge of relating these prosaic passages to the elevated discussion about them in the few authentically ancient politico-mythological and divination texts which discuss them.

One example of these is the second document under PT126, the supplementary text concerning the Dmu ("Une Lecture…", p. 305f). This text is correctly interpreted by MacDonald as showing that the world of the spirits is like the world of human beings. This correspondence is an example of the principle of bivalence which I introduced above, and which is important for understanding the religio-political values of the Imperium. Such beliefs reveal that parallel worlds were an important concept in the Imperium (and later). Human and spiritual beings are connected in a relationship of mutual representation and benefit; both have their worlds, and these intersect and depend on each other. (This is a model we often see in Central Asian and Siberian cosmologies.) This document explains by models *why* btsan-pos and *lha* spirits are interdependent. It teaches us, as does the passage below from the Rkong-po inscription, that what we see as "mythological" writings functioned as historical recitations for modeling current behavior. PT126 also provides a model for how a ruler should make offerings (*mchod*), based on the mythological model of the Phywa beings. For example, in this text the Sku Bla are, indeed, spiritual beings, but so are all the other characters. What is the purpose of such a recitation? It is that, as the Sku Bla are the spirit-protectors of the *lha* in "the other world", so there are in this world Sku Bla who are protectors of the living representatives of the *lha*, the btsan-pos. (Just as there are *lha* both in this world and in *gnam*, on which below.) As we see below, in a passage from the post-Imperial text PT1047 in n. 44, there is at least one explicit reference to a Sku Bla caring for the *lha* of a btsan-po.

In IO751 they are mentioned twice, first in a mythological statement of their importance since the time of the descent of 'Od Lde Spu Rgyal (verse 35v2). (As we shall see, this does not mean that we should only think of this as the hoary past but more as Eliade formulated it, *in illo tempore*. We have no evidence that those who composed the inscriptions considered him a mythological being; rather, they thought him an ancestor.) The second is when Ral-pa-can states that, because he acts according to the customs of all the *gtsug lag khang* (!), the Sku Bla "will support me for a long time (*sku bla rïng rdzï; rdzi = 'tsho*) and the *lha* and serpents of heaven and earth, indeed, all [beings] understand this

and are pleased [with me]" (verse 36r4). We are again reminded that Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, cited at Chapter One, n. 84, retained the *sku bla gsol ba*, while doing away with many other non-Buddhist rites. Ral-pa-can, a later emperor supportive of Buddhism, was still depending on them. The statements in this text are given in the context of the "lord who also is a mountain" (verse 36r2), a Hindu-Buddhist motif which is analyzed in Chapter Four.

The best example we have of the dual nature of the Sku Bla is also their earliest datable mention, in the Rkong-po inscription. (The text follows LI & COBLIN.198; cf. also RICHARDSON.1985.66.)

> *Gcen Kar-po nï / thog ma yas gshegs pa'ï tshe / mched gnyïs kyi / Sku Bla gnyan-po gsol ba dang / Sku Bla De-mo dang bshos pa'ï lha bdag bgyïd kyis kyang / Lha Sras kyï sku'i rïm gro la / bdagï srog la' bab pa ma chad kyï cho gar mdzad pa / srog phongs ma bgyïs te / Lha Sras kyï chab srïd 'di ltar mtho / dbu rmog brtsan[d]…*

The goal of this discourse is political. Sad-na-legs, who reigned *ca.* 799–815, is using prior service to the Imperium to show why the lineage of the local ruler, the Rkong Dkar-po, should proceed without interference from the btsan-pos. Immunity from government interference or seizure is given frequently as a reward for prior loyalty in the inscriptions, and independence for this otherwise subordinate ruler is justified as a reward provided during the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, father of Sad-na-legs. The immediate context of this passage is a recitation concerning the two sons of the ill-fated Dri Gum Btsan-po. The elder was Gnya' Khyi, who resided in Rkong Yul, while his younger son succeeded to the throne.[40]

One translation of this passage is:

> That elder brother [i.e., Sha Khyi] was (then) Kar-po;* when first he came from above (*yas*),** even though he acted as a *lha bdag*[41] who made the *sku bla gnyan po gsol ba*[42] of the two brothers and mated with the Sku Bla De-mo, he (further) performed ritual service for the *sku* of the Lha Sras and performed rites to the point that they became a threat to his own life. As he did not spare his own welfare, the dominion of the Lha Sras was as high as this [i.e., of his ancestors (*lha*)?], and his helmet was ruling.
>
> * I.e., when Sha Khyi was residing in Rkong Yul he became the "Kar-po", which was a term for a local ruling figure. See LI & COBLIN.208, for references.
>
> ** Note that LI & COBLIN.211 consider this a scoped phrase for an actual arrival from Yar Lung; "this statement is purely geographical".

This passage has usually been interpreted as referring only to a mythical event. [RICHARDSON.H.1985.67; LI & COBLIN.205; "Une lecture…", p. 298f; S. Karmay, "Les dieux des terroirs et les genévriers: un rituel tibétain de purification". JA.283.1995.177f. Helga Uebach disagrees with this at *Ein Beitrag zur Dokumentation der Inschrift von Rkoṅ-po*, p. 19.] The reality is more complex, and there are several reasons to reject a "mythic" interpretation. First, the only clearly mythological reference in Old Tibetan inscriptions is the claim of descent from *gnam* as a justification for rule, which claim functioned to support the political contents of the main body of the inscriptions. Other events in the inscriptions should be assumed to refer to historical realities; otherwise, they would have no practical value as political messages. Examples include the recitations of the loyal behavior of Myang Ting-ne 'Dzin and Stag Sgra Klu Khong. The inclusion of what we now consider "mythological" characters, e.g., Gnya' Khyi and the Ya Bla Bdag Drug (on the latter see the *précis* of interpretations at LI & COBLIN.209) at the opening of the inscription is likewise not determinative for the historicity of events later narrated. (This is not to mention that the btsan-pos seem not to have considered Gnya' Khyi/Khri to have been mythological. He is usually mentioned in historical narratives.) There really was an office of Kong [D]kar-po, who is mentioned in historical sources as well as the *Chronicle*, in which historical events are woven together to create a dramatic "court" epic. Phying-ba Stag Rtse is mentioned in that phrase, so a historical location is referred to.

We should also consider that the idea of some kind of mating of human beings with purely spiritual beings is unknown in Tibetan mythology; the "mating of the rock ogress with the monkey" motif is, in fact, proof of that. However, the creation of offspring as a political act to cement a relationship with a btsan-po or to create a legitimate successor are in accordance with the other citations we have in Old Tibetan documents which are closest to the use of *bshos pa* here. When that term designates procreation in other Old Tibetan passages it is not about legendary events but is used in factual statements, albeit elevated.[43] The verb is certainly honorific, and necessarily so here, as it refers to service by *the* Rkong Kar-po in aid of the Imperium.[44]

Finally, and to elaborate, a purely mythological event would have been out of place in a recitation of otherwise historical events which people are expected to recognize, and which escalate in importance until we come to the apex of his effort, when he subvened, or performed, political rites of a sort that were actually performed at court (*sku'i rïm gro*,

on which see Chapter Three) to such an extent that he put his life in jeopardy (through a process we don't understand) but which ultimately resulted in the strengthening of the throne and Imperium.

Certainly, this is not a simple, mythological recitation. While we do not understand well everything in this narrative—the wide variance in translations attests to this—it basically refers to events performed in this world presented in a phrasing only considered today to be mythical. Some Rkong Kar-po had an ancestor who served a Sku Bla, De-mo, in this world, so the Sku Bla mentioned here are most likely not spiritual beings only, but their human representatives. This explains why the "Sku Bla De-mo" is a figure from De-mo, a real place. Why mention a real location for a purely mythological event? If more modern interpretations have validity for this older narrative, this Rkong Kar-po would also have been a representative or intermediary of the *yul lha* of De-mo. This accords with the only other early occurrence of the elevated office of *lha bdag*, where it is reasonably clear that it was also held by a human being (see n. 41).

References to the Sku Bla are found in a few other sources, but, unfortunately, the passage in the Rkong-po inscription is the only one that gives us substantial context. Citations in mythological and divination documents cited below, while brief, show that they were known to a wider audience—they were not simply creatures of the court—and were popularly considered to have great influence over the lives of individuals and even rulers. In most of these citations, as well, there is ambiguity about what exactly is being referred to when the Sku Bla are intoned. (Since these are post-Imperial sources, we must always consider that their authors were ignorant of the nature of the Sku Bla.)

Divination by various means has always been important in Tibetan culture. It often cannot be determined what the nature of beings referred to is in these oldest materials, however, since spiritual beings, human beings (including lamas), astrological phenomena, etc., are mixed together as elements and determinants of the outcome. However, one Old Tibetan divination text of some age, but post-Imperial, contains a passage which tells us about the relationship between the ruler and the Sku Bla. In it, a Sku Bla is an intermediary in accepting an offering which, by some mechanism, he transfers to the ancestral spiritual being (*lha*) of the rgyal-po. This offering, when accepted, benefits the rgyal-po and shows that the central function of the Sku Bla seems to have been taking care of the leader's *lha*.[45] Again, this points toward a

human agency connected with spiritual powers. Other prognostications in that text point to mortal danger when the Sku Bla abandons (*'phang ba*) the rgyal-po. This degree of separation also perhaps indicates an independent origin or power-base for the two offices. In Chapter One we put forward some reasons for considering the btsan-po to have been an office inserted into Tibetan society. *Perhaps* the btsan po and the Sku Bla represented two bases of power that had been brought together when the office of btsan-po was introduced, and the Sku Bla retained an independent base which was valued by some as a check on the powers of the btsan-po, and more particularly in their relationship with their *lha*, which was vital to their strength and success.

This is, unfortunately, virtually all we know about the Sku Bla: They were acknowledged as a primary support for the Imperium in the oldest documents we find them in, which are secular. Even the translation literature of the time shows clearly that Tibetans considered them among the most important religio-political entities in the Imperium. The *Shangshu* translations into Tibetan which mention them, but not the btsan-pos, may be telling us that at least some considered them more central to the success and power of the Imperium than the btsan-pos.[46]

In view of this, we should consider what the Sku Bla, as human beings representing powerful spiritual beings, might have been. The history of their development *may* have been the matter of a synthesis of mythologized clan ancestors with a holy mountain in that clan's homeland. (Such mountain spirits today are most commonly considered *gzhi bdag*.) As the btsan-pos' power grew, they conquered and bound these clans to oaths. The *lha*s of the clan leaders then became affiliated through this oath-taking with the *lha*s of the btsan-pos—just as the human leaders bound themselves with oaths to the btsan-po. The power of the clan leadership was presumably elevated through this. Reciprocally, the power of that btsan-po was strengthened by the protection and support those spiritual beings (*lha*) oathed to give him, as well as the manpower that representatives of the clans' powers brought with them to serve the btsan-po and his court (*pho brang*). Some of these leaders were chosen to become the Sku Bla. They moved about the Imperium, both seasonally and as circumstances required (thus their presence in 'A-zha territories and elsewhere in the TLTD.II documents), to represent the interests of their clans and to bring with them the power of their ancestral spirits. This was done by rites that may have been partly religious in nature (*sku bla gsol ba*). When at the court, they intermediated between the

btsan-po and *lha*, although which *lha* remains an important question (on which see the quote from PT1074 below).

Today, one can still find Sku Bla occasionally mentioned in ritual and mythological texts, almost always simply as an epithet or a title connected with mountains. This seems to be because a variety of traditions in post-Old Tibetan contexts considered them to always have been part of a "mountain cult",[47] which is not at all obvious in Old Tibetan materials. Dictionary definitions offer yet a third explanation of their nature, and these *might* provide a link between the older data and the modern view which is not attested in Old Tibetan materials. Or, as often happens, they might simply be a confused vision based on later traditions.[48]

Several facts are troublesome for comprehending what the role of mountains might have been in the religious life of the Imperium. As obvious as it may seem to be from looking at the modern Tibetan landscape—although there are also problems there[49]—we really have no evidence about the significance of mountains at the court. No reference to them is found in the inscriptions, the most "public" political documents and the ones in which we could expect a relationship to be acknowledged, because it would have involved a cultus at least partly known to the public, and because clan leaders presumably would have had similar beliefs. In fact, the only reference we have is in PT016, a Buddhist text. To bring in a chronologically close, but culturally perhaps distant example, we have the numerous physical manifestations of the "mountain cult" of the Devarājas as described by Kulke (*Kings and cults: state formation and legitimation in India and Southeast Asia*), especially pp. 338ff, which presents numerous and significant differences with Tibetan data. There is no evidence that 'O Lde Spu Rgyal has anything to do with a mountain in the inscriptions, much less Gnya' Khyi/Khri Btsan-po, even though the Rkong-po inscription does mention—almost in passing—that Gnya' Khri simply arrived at Lha Ri Gyang Do (l. 4) after (we assume) leaving *gnam*. It might be easy to believe that such beliefs must have existed—perhaps there were even popular traditions at that time that held so. Nevertheless, we have no direct evidence to support a continuity of belief and cult involving mountains from the time of Btsan-po Gnam Ri Slon Mtshan until the time of Ral-pa-can, when it surfaces in a different environment completely.

In sum, the cultural distance between modern Tibetan religion and the Imperial period shows itself best in the offices of the btsan-pos and

the Sku Bla. Since neither survived the transition to a Buddhist Tibet, nearly all details about them represent what later traditions have wanted us to see. Perhaps the best way to understand the Sku Bla is by following the principle of bivalence we laid out above, which is a constant of Buddhist and "non-Buddhist" belief in Tibet: Human beings in sacred religio-political office represent themselves as individuals and as the spiritual powers which support them. The *lha btsan-po* is the highest-ranking office and title in this early system, and is the most important example of this model in early Tibetan society (and one that bears more than a superficial relationship to the office of *sprul sku*).

bla, bla ma

This brings us to *bla*. Once again, there have been few attempts to consider its etymology and place it in a broader context.[50] Its occurrences in Old Tibetan documents are divided into two usages. In the first, its most common and oldest use, it is a "metaphorical" noun, the most common designator for the government of the Imperium.[51] In Buddhist texts, we have the early calque *bla na m*[*y*]*ed pa*, for Sanskrit *anuttara*, but we also see *bla myed* in non-Buddhist, political contexts (e.g., PT1038.15). And in the office of *bla ma*, the meanings "high", "above", and "government" survived intact into the Phyi Dar.

The nuances of *sku, chab srid*, and *bla* to represent various dimensions of "government" show how subtle the political thinking in the Imperium was, and how little we understand it. We have seen how *sku* functioned in one way as the "occult", greater presence of the btsan-pos. To help understand *bla* as government we must think of "authority", something that is just above us, hovering over us, as it were, for the shade of its meaning indicates "that which is directly above". When you read the passages it occurs in, this use, with this connotation, combines functionality and metaphor. *blar myi bzhes pa* is common in Old Tibetan texts for "not remanding to the government", e.g., that which is "upper" of us. *bla* as government conveys almost a predatory feeling of an abiding, all-seeing presence. This shade of meaning also occurs, not coincidentally, in early Phyi Dar literature about Avalokiteśvara, where its use is consistently amenable to political application.[52] Other Old Tibetan phrases reflecting this shade of meaning as "immediately over-hanging" include *bla bre*[*s*] and *bla yug*. We occasionally see *bla* refer to local authority (OTMET.542;645;655—the Mkhar Bzhi Bla), but

it seems in such passages that this term is being used to assert their role as representatives of the Imperial government. Whatever else it came to mean, the earliest use of *bla* was as a functional metaphor for "the government of the Imperium", and it expressed an abiding presence requiring the constant acknowledgment and attention of its subjects.

This usage connects us with what later became its dominant meaning, which is usually, and certainly not always comfortably, rendered "soul". (It should be noted that *bla* = government is still sometimes encountered even today, and it is also found in a number of ambiguous passages in early modern literature.) With the exception of the important derivative term *bla ma*, discussed below, the uses of these terms seem difficult to reconcile. However, if we assume that the same bivalence is found in this term as in *sku* and *lha*, we arrive at a bifurcated concept of "superiority", one which referred to the individual members of the government, made up of the nobility—who were superior—and one applied to the government considered collectively as a great, transcendent *bla*. There is evidence for this interpretation: Even in recent Tibetan works *bla* is used for the collective nobility, i.e., the abstract idea of "lordship" (e.g., *pati* is a match for *bla* already in the MV), inasmuch as the government of the Imperium was a set of layers of nobility. It is likely that *bla* as "the upper" always incorporated the idea of control, so that, when we consider the leadership as an entity they were really the *animus* of that society. The adaptation of this term in early Phyi Dar Buddhist translations of astrological concepts, etc., show that what we often render as "soul" was in these uses a matter of a guiding power within an individual. Still today *bla chen po* is used to describe those of great accomplishment.[53]

Understanding the relationship between these dimensions of *bla* is another key to a clearer view of the religious ideology of the Imperium: Corporate, bivalent concepts were a way to unite the leadership of the Imperium. *sku* was one such principle. *bla* is also found in contexts, already in the inscriptions, where one could expect to find the btsan-po directly referred to. These examples show how the btsan-po and the nobility were united in a greater whole, and this raises the question of what, in the final analysis, actually "belonged" to a btsan-po,[54] and what his role was in the concept of the state.

One of the most significant terms in Tibetan Buddhism is *bla ma*. It is already attested in later Dunhuang materials, and it seems to have developed in a tight arc of meanings which, again, revolve around

authority. Only this time, of course, it meant the authoritative leadership of those who were teaching the Buddhadharma as the way to enlightenment and liberation. Its origin and meaning thus lie in a fundamental intersection of "authority of the state" and "authority of the teacher", as it arose late in the Imperium.

The term seems to be easily resolved into its constituents. It is *bla* + *ma*, a postposition which creates abstract nouns from nouns and adjectives, as *mdun ma*, "the front one", from *mdun*. Berthold Laufer described this long ago in his "Bird divination among the Tibetans", p. 48. Therefore, the term *bla ma* should literally mean, "the superior one".

PT016 is a set of texts from the time of Ral-pa-can dealing with, among other things, that btsan-po taking refuge before his Sangha; materials dealing with De-ga G.yu-tshal Monastery are prominent in it. There is also a source in the Bstan 'Gyur, *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma las mdo btus pa* (BKA' YANG DAG), which most likely emanated from the court of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan. These materials sufficiently explain the Buddhist origin of the term. In both, *bla ma* occurs by itself and in phrases with a meaning nearly indistinguishable from *bla* alone. For example, PT016.30r3 gives us: *yon bla re dang gdugs phul bas nï 'gro ba mang po'ï bla mar gyurd te*, "By offering a dais and a parasol as gifts, one comes into authority over many beings…" This phrase would have the same meaning if *blar* were substituted for *bla mar*.

BKA' YANG DAG is an important document for several reasons, including explaining the significance of *gtsug lag*. Unlike PT016, it presents itself fundamentally to be a "philosophical" text, and one of the reasons it is convincing as the work that it is claimed to be—from Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's court—is that it approaches Buddhist doctrines with the same idiosyncracy that we find in his extended Bsam-yas edict in Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag. A set phrase, *X las bla mar gyur pa*, occurs several times in BKA' YANG DAG, such as at 101.6.1–2: *rtags yod pa gang zhe na / yang ni mi las bla mar gyur pas gtsug lag tu gyur ston to*, "If one asks, 'What are your proofs?', then, because they are superior to (those arguments put forward by) human beings, they are shown to have become *gtsug lag*."

bla ma does not seem to occur in either Old Tibetan or early Classical Written Tibetan materials outside of Buddhist contexts (OTM.117#364 is probably a late Old Tibetan fragment of a Buddhist text.) The phrase also quickly became an abstract concept; cf. its numerous occurences

as an equivalent of *uttara* in the *Mahāvyutpatti*, although in two cases there it does render *guru*. (It is interesting that it does not occur in the older *Madhyavyutpatti*.) The term was standardized in Vinaya studies as an equivalent of *ācārya* (*slob dpon*). How this term fits into categories of learning, etc., there is described in Blo-gros Legs Bzang, *Dam chos 'Dul ba Mdo rtsa ba'i gzhung 'grel ṭik chen Rin chen phreng ba'i dgongs rgyan = Dulwa shung-drel* (Bylakuppe, 1996, pp. 67–69).

We therefore have a pretty clear track from *bla ma* as an abstract term for "superiority" in a political context to its use as a calque of *uttara*, also meaning "superior", in a general sense. How, exactly, did this come to apply to a monk or other Buddhist teacher? At PT016.24r4–v1 we have:... *gtsug lag khang rgya chen po tshad myed pa'ï dmyigs pa dang ldan pa / rnam par dag pa'ï yo byad thams cad kyïs / de bzhin gshegs pha de dag thams cad la stï stang du bgyï'o / bla mar bgyï'o / rï mor bgyï'o*... This phrase immediately follows a detailed enumeration of the contents (*yo byad*) of De-ga G.yu-tshal Monastery, and may be rendered: "... (and) this extensive *vihāra*, because its contents, which are pure, are possessed of objects of meditation beyond number, is to be shown respect for all the Tathāgatas (there), is to be made to be (an object of) superiority, is to be made venerated." (The phrase *bla mar bgyi'o* is the transitive equivalent of *bla mar gyur pa*.) About the only attribute of De-ga G.yu-tshal not praised in this passage, which begins at .24r1, is its inmate monks. They certainly would have been viewed with the same respect by Ral-pa-can, and he would have required that the citizens of the Imperium support and venerate them. Thus, the concept of a monk or Buddhist teacher as a *bla ma* was born from such an environment, where the presence of such persons was to be considered equivalent to that of the Buddhas, etc.[55] Even clearer is PT1123.10–11, which gives us a quotation, unfortunately fragmentary: *btsan po / Khri Gtsug Lde Bstsan gyi zha snga nas kyang / 'gro ba'i bla ma mang pos... bskul ba'i gnas thob par smon no*, which, following the previous passage, indicates that all beings—*lha*, human beings, *srog chags*, etc.—established (*gnas*) however they are in the world, are to become fixed in a state of excellence, and they are being induced/admonished to do so by many *superiors among beings*. This is how the office of *bla ma* was described during Ral-pa-can's reign. It is clear that this btsan-po intended the lamas—whom he saw as his agents—to be political and religious sources of spiritual benefit. This is quite in keeping with Buddhist custom going back to Aśoka.

The term and office *bla ma* is an excellent early example of the fusion of religious belief with political authority which characterizes Buddhism in Tibet.

lha

sku and *bla* were fundamentally corporate concepts, and to understand *lha* we must first take into account that it functioned in the same system.

The interpretation of *lha* is also an example of a common weakness of religious studies, *viz.*, that initial choices of interpreting a term narrowly may become fixed in academic tradition, so that there is little future reflection on the need to alter its assigned meaning or define it more precisely. Once terms such as "god", "soul", "shamanic", etc., are used for concepts in a religion, there seems little interest in developing a better understanding of them. We have already seen this with *bla*. From the time of the first Buddhist scholarship on Tibet, *lha* has been rendered "god", even in contexts where that makes no sense. Of course, this is due to the fact that it was matched, at some time during the Imperium, with *deva*. Beyond this equation research has not gone, although the earliest occurrences of the term are in "non-Buddhist" contexts. Clearly, to understand Tibet's important religious terminology we must be able to see it in both its oldest uses and in its transit from "non-Buddhist" court religion to its later meanings. There are passages in transitional materials—early Phyi Dar texts that seem to preserve data about Imperial-period religion and customs, such as the *Sba bzhed* traditions and the *Bka'-gdams glegs bam*—which help us see how Buddhists of the time preserved these earlier values.[56]

If we consider its use in truly Old Tibetan political and mythological passages—i.e., in the inscriptions, the *Chronicle*, and the few other texts with authentically ancient contents, the best we can do to approximate a chronological analysis—the need for a different interpretation is clear. To understand what happened, we must be able to see that *lha* took part in the same process as *sku*, one which preserved an earlier meaning while simultaneously ameliorating it as a concept within a Buddhist cosmological system. Remember, the Tibetan court was not taken over by foreign monks intent on radically changing its ideology (there is no evidence this happened anywhere). The principle purpose of the Sanghas at the Tibetan courts in establishing Buddhism was,

above all, to gain the approval of the btsan-pos and their circle. Thus, terminology was not subverted; terms were not replaced. Instead, they were augmented *ad maioram maiestam* of the rulership to show how Buddhism could accommodate them within its world. In this way, a core terminology with parallel significance, one in the Buddhist world and one in the court world, was created. How long this system remained with its separate applications is not clear, but it may only have ceased with the fall of the Imperium. The juxtaposition of normative Buddhist terminology with imperial phraseology in PT016 indicates that Ral-pa-can (r. 815–838) conceived of the systems as being complementary, to his benefit, with the power of the Buddhist Sangha augmenting that of others who supported him as btsan po. The first Buddhist vocabularies had been composed by his time; terms such as *lha* and *sku* had been assigned their equivalences (*lha* already in the *Madhyavyutpatti, sku* in the later *Mahāvyutpatti*). Of course, this btsan po did not consider himself a Buddhist exclusively; the terms retained—in fact, had to retain—their values in both systems. *lha* meant what it had before—figures such as ’Od Lde Spu Rgyal and previous btsan-pos, all imperial ancestors, real and (to our minds today) mythological. Only now they were also raised to the rank of *deva*. It helps to keep in mind that there is nothing against *deva*s being human beings in traditional Indian thinking, and there was little distinction between the great ‘gods’ and great personages as beings worthy of worship in the Indic world, as well as in Scythian and Greek belief.[57]

The early transmitters of Buddhist doctrine wanted people to see Tibetan religio-political concepts in a new, greater dimension. To see how this was done, let us consider the most important early term for rulership in the inscriptions, *lha btsan po*.

First, it is an interesting point of morphology that most of the important titles in the Tibetan political tradition—*btsan po*, *rgyal po*, *blon po*, *btsun po*, etc., and their feminine equivalents—are, in form, adjectives. The use of these titles from the early inscriptions on show that they were not recognized as such at the time the Tibetan language began to be written. Thus, terms such as *btsan po* are nominals which were originally adjectival forms. This suggests that at some earlier time Tibetan political thinking was quite different. In its usage in the inscriptions, *lha btsan po* seems to be an appositional phrase, the two elements nouns. Thus, one could render this title, “the *lha* (who is also the) *btsan po*” since in such compounds the former represents the

greater category into which the following elements fit in descending order of size or importance. We are thus dealing with a ruler whose chief characteristic is something more than simply being a *lha*. (*lha*, of course, existed both on and above earth, as has been explained above.) He is also a *btsan-po*. The latter term has been taken to mean "the firm one" or "the strong/violent one". Both from a grammatical as well as a functional viewpoint, and in terms of the oldest phraseology in the inscriptions, some meaning like this seems appropriate, for the fundamental nature of the Tibetan ruler as warrior. (More on this in Chapter Four.) Even the Tang historical sources say that Tibet was founded by "a great warrior", so this was seen by all as the nature of their leader, and this quality was a result of a guiding ancestral spirit (*lha*). [BUSHELL.439]

In any event, it makes no sense grammatically, or syntactically, to consider *lha* an adjective, as it has usually been rendered: "divine *btsan po*", etc. (I do not mean to imply that imperial titulature must always make sense grammatically. However, when it does not, we must try to understand why it does not.) 'O Lde Spu Rgyal, etc., were *lha*; Srong Btsan Sgam-po was a *lha* to Ral-pa-can (Skar Chung inscr., l. 4). Deceased rulers, back to what many consider their mythological predecessors, were *lha*, i.e, the *gnam* [*gyi*] *lha*, and *myes*, "ancestors". Thus, it is another corporate concept. By definition, the generations of leaders that followed these ancestors are particular instances of *lha*-ness. A clear statement to that effect is the opening of the east side of the Zhwa'i Lha Khang inscription (at RICHARDSON.H.1985.54 and LI & COBLIN.271): *myï'i rgyal po lhas mdzad pa / 'phrul gyï lha btsan po Khri / Lde Srong Brtsan gyi / bkas*… "By order of the btsan-po Khri Lde Srong Brtsan (i.e., Sad-na Legs), a *lha* manifested, made by the lha [to be] a king of men…"[58] There is a similar titular phrase at PT016.25v3: *Bod kyï lha btsan po myi rje lhas mdzad pa Khri Gtsug Lde Brtsan zhal snga nas kyang yab myes 'phrul kyï lus bzhïn dgab cing bkur ba nï gnam sa dang mtsungs*. This long declaration contains the opening phrase, "Oh ancestors! Casting according to need (*bzhin*) [your] bodies of transformation, we praise them as equal to the heavens and earth (in number)!". In other words, they manifest to protect the Imperium in infinite numbers.

There is thus nothing in the nature of *lha* shown in "non-Buddhist" Old Tibetan materials that would lead us to consider them to be "gods". The phrase *'phrul gyi lha* is also no evidence to that effect.

The phrase which shows most clearly that *'phrul* and *lha* relate to each

other on a "genealogical" level, so to speak, is line 34 of the east side of the Treaty Inscription of 821/822: *btsan po yab lha 'phrul Khri Lde Srong Brtsan*. The titulature used here is for the former, late btsan-po, and is made of three apposed sections: The imperial throne name of the ruler (Khri Lde Srong Brtsan, i.e., Sad-na Legs, d. 815), his functional title, *btsan po*, and a descriptive modifier relating to his origin and status. We can also render this set of appositions in reverse order: "Khri Lde Srong Btsan, an ancestral (*yab*, a term used for deceased rulers) *lha* manifested, a btsan-po." In this case it is especially clear that "miraculous", "magical", etc., do not make sense for *'phrul*, and there is no need to compare such phrasings with Chinese equivalents to understand them. There is nothing in titulature containing *'phrul* which would indicate that it is modelled on Chinese concepts, as Rolf Stein has asserted. If anything, it could be of Buddhist inspiration. (On the last two points, see n. 58.)

The system of belief that deceased ancestors were generically called *lha* and deemed to have a positive impact on living descendents included, but was not limited to, the btsan-pos. This is shown by the names (again, actually titles) of high authorities, including some *blon po*s: Lha'i Zung, Lha Lod, Lha Bzang, etc. These titular phrases are expressions of some relationship between an ancestral spiritual being and his living descendent, to the benefit or blessing of the latter; *lha btsan po* was the highest such expression. Again, bivalence between living human beings and categories of spiritual beings shows itself to be a hallmark of Tibetan thinking and is indispensable for the understanding of Tibetan religio-political hierarchy throughout its history.[59]

It is thus clear that *lha* has functioned, more than anything else, from early in its use to the present time, as a complex, socio-politico-religious term.[60] Its use in Old Tibetan documents presupposes a religious or cultic dimension, one which is chronicled in Tang sources but comes through clearly in emic ritual literature only in rites from much later times, such as the *lha bsang*. Like *bla, lha* reflects a corporate unity, in this case an elevated sense of clan—or, in the case of the btsan-pos, family—unity through descent from one or more ancestors who came to be seen as spiritual beings. If we do not look at it in such terms, it is difficult to understand what the *lha* were conceived of to be in early sources. Modern Tibetan thinking is reticent to discuss their "Tibetan" side, and it is interesting that *lha* have never been described in traditional Tibetan lexical materials or ritual texts. (After all, we learn from

them that the *btsan* spirits are red, warlike, and inhabit red-colored boulders, etc. We also have images of *btsan*. On this, note also that the btsan-pos had their palace on *Dmar-po* Ri, 'Red Mountain', in Lhasa.) That *lha* is equated with *deva* in word lists meant to establish Indic Buddhist equivalents for Tibetan vocabulary presents a tautology, since neither term is defined in any context. Newer dictionaries such as BRDA BKROL and BOD RGYA have preserved some traditional Tibetan understanding by defining *lha* first not as a sort of god, or even an elevated or disembodied spiritual being, but as a "ruler of men". These modern lexicographers also still see it as a political term, even while they present it enmeshed in scholastic categories. The entry in BRDA BKROL, based on Buddhist exegesis (the *'Dul ba'i gleng 'bum gyi ming brda'i rnam bshad*), applies entirely to power and status in this world. In it we see Indic Buddhist and Tibetan concepts apposed: *lha = rgyal po ni 'jig rten gyi lha dang / rgyal chen ris bzhi pa sogs skye po'i lha dang / 'phags pa'i gang zag sogs*. The last two definitions apply to Tibetan society in particular, and it is one of the most important legacies of the social structure of the Imperium reinforced by general Indic concepts. The idea that someone reaches that status through birth or social elevation preserves the two ancient methods we learn about in ancient sources: By birth among the nobility, or through heroic effort on behalf of the Imperium. Other modern dictionaries, such as Bsod-nams-rgyal-mtshan's *Tshig mdzod brda dag Kun gsal me long*, published in 1990 and reprinted in 2002, give a more doctrinal definition based on the *ṣaḍgati* concept, i.e., *deva* as one of the six categories of beings in this world system. As is often the case with a culturally-rich term, the definition you find depends on the viewpoint of the lexicographer and the sources he chooses.

The best of the modern monolingual dictionaries is the *Dag yig gsar bsgrigs*, published in Dharamsala in 1990 and reprinted since. Its superiority lies in the number of nominal compounds it provides and describes in detail. Two definitions relevant to this discussion are: *lha gcig = rgyal po dang sras mo sogs 'bod pa'i zhe sa*, and [*lha*] = *bod kyi rus shig*, i.e., the former is an honorific term for a king and his consort; the latter is the term for a particular Tibetan lineage.

These definitions complete the nexus between rule and inherited status. They also show that even more normative Buddhist concepts continue to be defined in a context which reinforces traditional Tibetan social notions.

One point that emerges clearly from reading what have usually been accepted as "mythological" passages in the inscriptions and other Imperial-period Old Tibetan documents is that we need to find a new way to understand them. No one definition is sufficient for all examples of usage, and there is clear evidence showing that there was a hierarchy even among the *lha*. We now analyze two brief passages from the inscriptions that illustrate this and other points of the political mythology of the btsan-pos.

The openings of PT126 and PT1287 have much in common with the contents of the inscriptions. (For example, the narrative cited from the Rkong-po inscription above amounts to being an abridged version of the opening of PT1287, the *Chronicle*.) From a religious point of view, such recitations fulfill the need, *á la* Eliade, for mythic models *in illo tempore* which validate both where the status of the leadership has proceeded from, as well as how the aristocracy should behave, while serving as preambles for historical events used to support those principles. However, as we saw with the recitation above concerning the Sku Bla, this mythology was expressed in phraseologies which had real-world applications. In the following example, we have a complaint from noble leaders who are contractually bound to the btsan-po (here, Khri Srong Lde Brtsan) by the systems of oaths. They present their case, that the happiness which has come from this system is being threatened by unfair taxation, in the passage which follows this quote. The reason to quote this passage is that it follows the usual mythological opening of an inscription, wherein the basis for rule is stated as justified by the descent of the rulers from their home in *gnam*. It is interesting precisely because it represents the complaint of a loyal fief as reworded by the court. Those who composed the inscription were careful to encode the relationship between the Rkong Kar-po leaders and the btsan-pos in terms of this mythological model: Ancient custom should be followed because society has been ordered that way by the ancestral spiritual beings of the btsan-pos—their *lha*—in *their* political hierarchy. Of course, the complaints are very worldly, and as with the passage about Sku Bla above, this section of the inscription helps us understand how the Court saw the basis of the relationship between obedient servants and their btsan-pos. Here are verses 8–9 of the petition by the Kar-po Mang-po Rje and Lha'i-zung. They follow the common phraseology in the inscriptions that the first imperial ancestor existed before the "gods and men". This means, from the viewpoint of the court, before the nobility and the common people had been arranged under the

rule of the btsan-pos. The recitation of the Rkong-po party reads in part: . . . *yong lha sras gnam dang 'dra ba'ï chags 'og na / gnam k*[*h*]*ol du gnang ba'ang cïs bas zhïg mchis na / bdag cag lta zhïg / thog ma mched gyes nas / pha myes dang po lha myï ma phye ba tshun chad bde skyïd cïng* . . ., i.e., "Overall [*yong*], under the rule of the Lha Sras who is like *gnam* (in following the rule of his ancestors), if there was anything at all to give in service to *gnam*, from our side, from the time when, after the brothers (i.e., Gnya' Khri and Sha Khri, perhaps here also fulfilling a role as 'divine twins', *à la* Romulus and Remus?) had their origin, through the time of the first (imperial) ancestor, when *lha* and *myï* had not been differentiated, [because we rendered any such service] there being happiness . . ." (Compare the translations at RICHARDSON.H.1985.67–69 and LI & COBLIN.206. Difficulties in interpreting such passages in the inscriptions are in part due to the fact that all are only abbreviated versions; the complete texts of the edicts were written on scrolls and stored with the edict and elsewhere. A narrative such as this would be particularly amenable to ellipsis.)

Such passages must be understood as using mythological language of the descent from *gnam* of the brother-ancestors of the btsan-pos as the starting point of discourse with the Court. Again, we should not fail to recognize that the incidents involved in the main body of the inscriptions *must* refer to historical events; otherwise, what was the basis for them to be persuasive communications to those who read them? The message behind the passage here is that the Rkong-po rulers have accepted that the rulership of the btsan-pos has been ordained by *gnam* and has thus resulted in happiness, which they may or may not have believed. What could be read on the one hand as a straightforward mythological statement of the creation of an orderly society *in illo tempore* could have been merely a formalized recitation of the good results of a conquest these people had no choice but to accept. We can read in many similar statements in the inscriptions that this conquest has been "mythologized" in the sense that it was presented as pre-ordained by the supernatural nature of the btsan-pos and their leadership. Perhaps its court had existed already for so long (although this is debatable) that some actually believed there was a past time, a primordial chaos before human beings themselves had become well ordered by the descent of the lineage of the btsan-pos, who were destined to become the lords of the nobility (*lha*) and ordinary citizens for their benefit. In other words, the political mythology here was that the btsan-pos had rescued their fiefs and citizens from social disorder and had enriched them through

an oathing system whose validity rested on citizens acknowledging the supernatural origin of the lord they served.

There are, in fact, several passages in materials from Dunhuang in which one can read either criticism of the Imperium or an ironic interpretation of its mythological values. In AFL.IV.l.21, for example, we find the phrase, *lha myi ma [d]bye ba'i dus bzang po*, 'the good time when *lha* and men were not differentiated'. This passage seems to refer to an earlier, paradisiacal time when society functioned smoothly without social levels. Could it be evidence of a memory that the btsan-pos and their hierarchy were transplanted forcibly on the clans which were to become the Tibetan people under them? Reference to such a mythological past time tells us that at least some saw the structure of their society and the origin of the *lha* to be a necessity, not an ideal state of being.

The clearest example we have of the fact that there were *lha*, and then there were *LHA*, comes from the opening of the 'Phyong Rgyas inscription, a phrase all of us who have studied Old Tibetan materials have read: *lha btsan po yab myes lha dang myï'i rjer gshegs te*…Now, why would a *lha* have to come to be lord over other *lha*? The simplest way to understand this phrase is that the special sort of *lha* that was also a *btsan po* was superior in some way to *lha* that were not, and that it was ordained that the one should rule the other. An indication of how this might have been seen is provided in the Tibetan translation of a Vinaya commentary, the *Uttaragrantha*. Here may be the only information we have about where the more ordinary *lha* were thought to reside. Although Sanskrit equivalents *may* lie behind this description if read from an Indic point of view, the context of the passages refers to worship of "gods" (*devatā*) in general, and almost certainly is meant to refer to this in both the Indic and Tibetan worlds. Thus, when it says that *lha* inhabit forests, crossroads, etc., it is almost certainly addressing Tibetan conceptions, in order to better appeal to that audience. Such *lha* seem to be examples of the sort of spiritual being that would be the base for the superiority by the nobility: They are based on earth, so can claim "ownership" of land (*gzhi bdag*), in a way reminiscent of the Mongolian *ejed* and *qad*, among others. (On this passage see Greg Shopen's translation at "On Buddhist monks and dreadful deities: some monastic devices for updating the Dharma", p. 166.) All this stands in contrast to the transcendent, "heavenly-based" *lha* of the inscriptions, who support the btsan-pos as their ancestors. Again, it looks as if justification for the office of the btsan-po was in the form of a set of

superlative conceptions thrust on top of a pre-existent politico-religious and social hierarchy.

What are the important characteristics of this belief, and from where might they have originated?

lha is, in other contexts, attested as a collective term for the nobility. This is clearly shown in the *Chronicle* (PT1287). This work is described here as a court/heroic epic; the conflicts and intrigues are not between gods and men—indeed, spiritual beings are not important in it—but between groups of nobles who are behaving as clan representatives first and foremost in a way that exemplifies the corporate unity of (for want of a better expression) *lha*-ness, which is to say, the sense of the special status of the nobility. In line 149 we read Ceng Sku's verses criticizing Zing-po Rje: *chab chab ni pha rol na / yar chab ni pha rol na / myi 'i ni myi bu ste / lha'i ni sras po bzhugs / rje bden ni bkol du dga' / sga bden gyis ni bstad du dga'*. This may be rendered: "Beyond the rivers, beyond the rivers above them, there is a man, a son of men, residing as [would] a son of the aristocracy. It is true that he is a lord, but he loves to enslave; he enjoys saddling with his true saddle. (I.e., he enjoys misusing his authority by being oppressive in his rule)." The point of lines three and four is that his leadership and behavior are not in keeping with that of a true noble, a *lha*, but what could be expected of a commoner pretending to be one, not that he is a human being pretending to be a son of a god. There is no evidence that *lha sras* is used here in its Buddhist sense, as a calque of *devaputra*.[61] It is used as an honorific compound with reference, again, to the leadership quality of a true *lha* as a Lha Sras, a descendant whose behavior is worthy of his "noble ancestral spirits", among which are counted the btsan-pos, for which *lha sras* is an epithet which occurs in the Rkong-po inscription. (This is the only imperial-period inscription in which the term occurs; the Mtshur-phu inscription is almost certainly post-Imperial.) In that inscription, for example, we see at line 3 that legitimate rulers were among "the sons (*sras*) of the Ya Bla Bdag Drug", 'The Six Lords of the Upper Government'. This passage is thus an extended play on the contrast between *rje*, a functional term for someone in power, and a *lha sras*, someone who possesses a quality of leadership superior to brute force because of his noble origins in an ancestral spiritual power.

Passages such as these bring us back to the connection between social and political leadership and warrior valor. The Tang historical sources relate that nobility could be bestowed on a family that had lost three

generations of warriors in service to the btsan-po (see BUSHELL.443). In other words, *lha*-ness was created in heroic death. This makes perfect sense in a society as suffused with military values as was early Tibet. We should not discount the idea that the narratives of 'O Lde Spu Rgyal and his status were based on such a tradition; in fact, this is asserted in those Tang sources [BUSHELL.439]. This data helps us construct an internally consistent idea of what *gnam* meant in the Imperium.

The spirits, or souls, if you wish, of dead hero-leaders went to their celestial home (*dgung du gshegs* in truly Imperial-period documents; *gnam du song* is also found). We can see in the beliefs of early Indo-European peoples such as the Scythians that 'heaven' for their leaders was an idealized version of life on earth—the court of a warrior-elite, a sort of Valhalla—in which they continued to exercise some power over the fate of their family and clan and its homeland, if not greater areas. (The Ya Bla Bdag Drug was at least one group of these ancestral *lha*, a "government" or *bla* above us, in *gnam*.) The earthly *myes* or "ancestors", the dead btsan-pos, were venerated at their tombs.

Many of their spirits were located over mountains, which we call "sacred", but which were really visualized as their seats or as the location of their descent to earth. Living generations of btsan-pos derived superior wisdom, culture, etc. (their *gtsug lag*, on which see Chapter Four), from being their descendents and following their example, but they were able to do this *because* they were connected with them in *lha*-ness, which seems to have been a permanent element within them. At least in the case of the lineage of the btsan-pos, the connection between these ancestor-heroes (*lha*) and their living descendents was Gnya' Khri Btsan-po. This system is encapsulated in what may be the closest thing to a cliché we find in Old Tibetan political literature, that the ancestors of the Btsan-pos came from *gnam* to be "lords of men", as at Rkong-po inscr., l. 4: *thog ma ya bla bdag drug gï sras las / nya grï btsan po myi yul gyï rjer // lha rï gyang dor gshegs pa tshun chad / drï gum btsan po phan chad / gdung rabs bdun gyï bar du*…, or at Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's tomb inscr., l. 1: *btsan po lha sras / 'o lde spu rgyal // gnam gyï lha las myï'i rjer gshegs pa*. All descendents of these ancestors partake in this "*lha*-ness".

Such thinking may help us understand phrases such as *gnam sa'i rim pa lha 'o cog*, at DPA'-BO.1985.371, the extended Bsam-yas inscription. This cannot be interpreted as an Indic conception and makes no sense as a Chinese concept, but it is understandable as referring to the generations of btsan-pos, from those *myes* in *gnam*, 'ancestors in heaven', to

the current family and future generations on earth. In this text, their position in an enumeration is between Buddhist categories and sets of Tibetan spiritual beings meant to protect the Imperium. This illustrates the pivotal position of the royal family in the triad of power we see time and again in political passages from, e.g., PT016.

What similarities the Tibetan concept of *gnam* has with any other people commonly thought of as being (at least linguistically) closely related to them—e.g., the Chinese, the Burmese—will be instructive as to truly ancient similarities in the realms of politics and religion. As of now, as asserted in Chapter One, this system seems to match more closely with what we know of ancient Indo-European concepts.

What made the Indo-European peoples so bellicose, so faithful to the idea that the best way to serve their interests was in constant conquest? Many peoples have not had such cultural values, but it cannot be doubted that the successful spread of these peoples was due to the energy they put into conquests and military innovations to accomplish it. As we say, "What was their motivation?" *Immortality* as a warrior, of course, but not only as found through the bards' arresting lyrics. There was a more direct religious motivation: That glorious death in battle was a way *home*. The Sogdian *comitati* believed that death in battle returned them to their homes, i.e. in heaven, as reported in the *Xiyuji* (On this point see C. Beckwith, "Aspects of the history of the Central Asian guard corps in Islam", p. 37, where the passage "they look upon death as salvation" is more accurately rendered, "they look upon death as returning home [*gui*]"). As Dumézil said of the career of the Hindu king (*The destiny of a king*, p. 46): "And heaven, the many heavens, lodge beside and among the gods numerous eminent men who have escaped death or for whom death has been no more than the occasion for this happy emigration."

Indo-European myth is also replete with examples of warriors and leaders who have descended to, and ascended from, earth (examples include Krishna in the *Gītā* and Yudhisthira's translation to Svargaloka in the last book of the *Mahābhārata*, in which he became a *devatā*). The boundary between human and divine is certainly permeable, and in some examples the case is made for a more *human* divine body.[62]

Because the btsan-pos were principally inspired, even ecstatic, martial leaders, the Sanghas at early courts needed to develop an effective strategy to preserve his nature and other court beliefs within a Buddhist system. After all, most monks at the courts were Tibetan, and from

noble familes, so they also had faith in this system. This need resulted in a system of correspondences of terminology which complemented these beliefs without reinterpreting them in a way that questioned their legitimacy. *sku* and *lha* are the two most obvious examples, and some well-known compounds in Old Tibetan materials can be understood through an analysis of their socio-religious referents. The property of monastic estates, which were located on land belonging to noble clans, were called *lha ris*. They were not called this because Buddhist images might be there, because Bodhisattvas and Buddhas are not *deva*s; PT016 shows that distinction already. Rather, this phrase refers to an area delimited for the monks and those caring for its contents, since it was an establishment for Buddhists of the nobility (*lha*). On the same analogy, *lha khang*s might not have been so-called originally because the images inside were of *deva*s, but because the first ones built were the property of the btsan-pos, noble clans, and their families. Such temples were served by the *lha 'bangs*, who were not so-called because they were primarily concerned with images. As with many other compounds with *lha*, these are not calques of Indic or Chinese terms; they reflect local thinking of the time. (After the Imperium fell, some of these terms came to be interpreted differently; *lha khang* is an outstanding example. New compounds using these elements appear in the Phyi Dar with a strictly Buddhist reference, such as *lha sku* for a Buddhist image, which is found as early as the *Sba bzhed*.) What was the motivation for the creation of this vocabulary?

By far the most persuasive argument Buddhists at court could have made to btsan-pos for their religion finds it earliest surviving expression in an inscription from late in the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan.[63] He was convinced by them that his position atop society was the result of a dimension of his ancestry that he had not previously realized: In addition to being descended from *lha*, his heavenly ancestors and living descendents had achieved great things because they were also part of a Bodhisattva lineage. This is stated in the last line of the 'Phyong Rgyas inscription, where he is praised with the title *'phrul gyi lha byang chub chen po*, "The Great Bodhi(sattva?), the Lha transformed". Since *lha*-ness is a corporate concept, and he constantly praised former generations of btsan-pos as supportive of the Buddhadharma, we may assume that Khri Srong Lde Brtsan felt that this title also applied to them. In fact, one characteristic of his reign was that he made adhering to Buddhism more clearly a family matter than his predecessors seem to have. Bsam-yas was, of course, built at Brag Dmar. Not only was Brag Dmar the site of

the winter court of his father, Mes Ag Tshom; Khri Srong Lde Brtsan was born there, at a fort, Brag Dmar Grim Bzang, built by his father. It certainly seems that this Khri Srong Lde Brtsan was creating a Buddhist center for his family at Bsam-yas,[64] and this tradition is alluded to in early Rnying-ma historiography with the stories of Padmasambhava teaching him and his sons there "at night". (This, of course, does not preclude Bsam-yas from carrying other symbolic values.) All this would have been subsumed under his newly-discovered *gdung brgyud*; cf. the quotes at Chapter One, n. 27.

Finally, we need to consider why *deva* was chosen as an equivalent for *lha* in the first place. The categorical differences in the natures of these beings must have been apparent to early Buddhists in Tibet; *deva*s are not held in high esteem in normative Buddhist teaching. (However, they were held in esteem in neighboring Nepal and in most Indian societies.) Such matchings of Indic Buddhist concepts with honorific terminology were primarily intended to ameliorate the btsan-pos in the developing Buddhist cosmological and doctrinal systems supporting their rule. Encapsulating court beliefs in such Buddhist systems was a strategy commonly adopted by Sanghas; see the examples at n. 74 of this chapter. It also would have strengthened the bond between the btsan-pos and the Buddhist nobility at court (see Chapter Four), because both considered themselves *lha*, albeit of different sorts. To connect Indic ideas, even only marginally Buddhist concepts, with Tibetan political categories would have been mutually beneficial. The political cosmology of *gnam* as presented in note 61 also provides a venue. Buddhists at court could have equated the relationship between ancestral *lha* and their living representatives as ideas already expressed in Hindu and Buddhist rituals, whereupon the *lha* blessed and guided their actions, but now were at the same time also considered *deva* who blessed their actions with their high status in an Indic system.[65] This was not difficult to accomplish, despite the fact that Western scholarship has projected an attitude of exclusiveness within Buddhist Sanghas at court—as described in later sources, of course. This would not have accorded with political realities there. The functional identification of *lha* lineages with Bodhisattvahood and *deva* status is also consistent with areal patterns and long-standing Buddhist practices of recognizing power and authority at courts. It is the complementary reaction of a group of religious practitioners at a court which was seeking all useful religious resources, as discussed in Chapter One. Buddhist and Hindu

deities are worshipped in monasteries and temples throughout India, Nepal, and Tibet, and have been for a long time; this is an expression, more than a cause, of the obscure distinctions between these sorts of beings.[66] The constant presence of Newari artisans in Tibet would have contributed to this coalescence of respectful worship.

In practical terms, it mattered little what other statuses the leadership of Tibet enjoyed during the Imperium. The btsan-pos were being supported by a Sangha which was performing confession and other rituals for them, creating an unending stream of merit, as we shall see in Chapter Three. The btsan-pos were also proclaimed to be of a Bodhisattva lineage and certain to attain Enlightenment because of that. They quite probably were considered Cakravartins as well from an early period, on which see Chapter Four. Compared to these enjoyments and statuses, equating their ancestors with *deva*s was a short further step and even a logical assumption.

A brief excursus on the concepts lha chos *and* myi chos

Many concepts in Old Tibetan texts are difficult to understand today because they are disembodied entities; the Sku Bla are prominent in this group. Others endure and are still at work, "formative", we might say. For example, from the Imperium until early into the Phyi Dar, there was a proliferation of categories and concepts by which the nature of the *lha* and *mi*, the aristocracy and the general populace, was fixed. These categories are still meaningful. We are familiar with a number of appositions, of which these are basic: *lha yul/myi yul*, *lha rabs/myi rabs*, and *lha rigs/myi rigs*. These pairs are attested in Old Tibetan documents, but most occur rarely, and only in a few of those studied thus far. *lha chos/myi chos* is found most often. It presumably is the most basic, for it seems the earliest. Chronologically, the pair does not occur in the inscriptions, nor in the few Old Tibetan documents which are most likely from the Imperial period.[67] It is also not found in the BKA' YANG DAG and the materials in DPA'-BO.1985 which are believed to be copies or versions of works created in the name of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan. That it is not found there is consistent with the need for its development as understood here.

The pair *lha chos/myi chos* is embodied in Buddhist didactic literature from an early period in the Bka'-gdams-pa tradition ('Brom Ston's fundamental work, the *Mi chos gnad kyi phreng ba*, may be its

earliest formulation), and in this tradition they are presented as having been originally Buddhist concepts. However, their origin has not been critically analyzed. As we have seen, *chos* in Old Tibetan literature originally did not mean "Buddhism", but something more like "religious norm" or "correct ritual method/practice", rendered by the Chinese *dao*, 'way, path', in the *Shujing* commentaries. If we imagine it with this meaning, *lha chos* would originally have meant something like, "the religious methods/way of the aristocracy/(those with) *lha*", and *myi chos* the same, respectively, for the common people. These terms were consistently used in Buddhist contexts from very early in the Phyi Dar, so if they were not created for Buddhist purposes they were quickly taken over into that system. As a phrase in the context of the court and Tibetan society, *lha chos* would have more precisely meant, "correct (Buddhist) religious practice by the nobility". As we have already seen, Buddhists were made up of the nobility, and, along with some scattered foreign Buddhists (e.g., the Khotanese monks) who were considered assets at court because of their skills, these constituted the early Sanghas at court. We can see how natural it would have been for the nobility to take upon themselves the mantle of continuing to represent Buddhism after the Imperium. They were the hereditary standard bearers for that tradition early in the Phyi Dar. In any case, it is clear that defining the term with reference to *lha* as "god"/*deva* makes no sense from the point of view of normative Buddhist thinking.

We have seen (Chapter One, n. 39) that Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag 'Phreng-ba, based in part on an expansion of the *Sba bzhed* traditions, asserts that Khri Srong Lde Brtsan engaged in nothing less than massive social engineering to either cement established categories of society or reinterpret them to the benefit of Buddhism. Immediately following is a passage describing in some detail customs appropriate to this social division.[68]

According to the passage immediately following, this happened during the reign of the Tang Emperor Daizong (r. 780–805); Bsam-yas is traditionally considered to have been completed *ca*. 787. The advisor Mgos in these passages is certainly meant to be the famous minister 'Gos, who aided Khri Srong Lde Brtsan in establishing Buddhism in Tibet.

These passages, quasi-historical as they are, represent the only attempt to give an origin to the divisions of *lha chos* and *mi chos*. Was Khri Srong Lde Brtsan modifying Tibetan social distinctions as part of a program to establish Buddhism as his state religion to create a happy,

well-ordered Tibetan society? Was *lha chos* really part of this grand design? It is a believable account *per se*. However, it is much more likely a later, monkish tradition meant to attribute the origin of *lha chos* to a famous emperor. It also cements the role of the noble clans as leaders of Buddhism in the Phyi Dar, when they perhaps saw their position declining in importance.[68]

Honorific language and social distinctions predated Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, of course, and that makes this proclamation even more interesting. Various interpretations of it make sense in their own way as a support of the noble families. The Sba (Dba'as) family was prominent during his reign, Sba Gsal Snang the most well-known of them, so this narrative could have served their interests well in preserving their status in the Buddhist leadership after the fall of the Imperium and the disappearance of the office of btsan-po. Nothing in the few early sources in which it is prominent contradicts a view that the *lha chos*/ *mi chos* distinction was the creation of Buddhists in Tibet either late in the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan or thereafter, but probably *not* before the end of the Imperium.

PT126 and PT239 may be the oldest sources which elaborate *lha chos*, even though they are not *old*. Neither are Imperial-period, nor even truly Old Tibetan documents, although they have some archaic orthographic features (including *ya btags* and reversed *gi gu*s). PT239 is also idiosyncratic orthographically, but neither the grammar nor spelling of either document is particularly old. ("Archaic" orthography, as we have said, lived on as an areal feature long after the Imperium in Chinese Turkestan, when it was an outpost on the border of Tibetan culture, as Geza Uray and Tsuguhito Takeuchi have shown.) Their manner of presenting Buddhist beliefs, however, are reminiscent of the extended introduction to the Bsam-yas inscription in Dpa'-bo Gtsug Lag and the BKA' YANG DAG. They sketch out characteristics of *lha chos* and lay the groundwork for its apposition to *mi chos*. In the citations in PT126, in particular, the reference is clearly to Buddhism, but simultaneously points to 'noble' behavior as part of that life. As in so many other cases, the reference is two-fold, simultaneously religious and political-social. At line 3 of PT126 we read: "Holding this one life, power, and wealth to be the highest goal is not practicing even one good *lha chos*; while not being aware of it, a *bdud* will carry you away." Lines 48ff introduce the idea of rebirth and its connection with cause and effect; they emphasize *sdig* (*pa*), not an important topic in other Old Tibetan Buddhist materials. They also continue the topic of

the ethics of killing, ostensibly aimed at lay (*upāsaka*) nobles. Advice such as, "If you don't want your own wife, don't cheat [and] don't seduce others' wives with gold", and, "Not understanding the really true teaching,[69] one will consider gossips and disruptors to be honorable men" sound like Bka'-gdams-pa moralisms, and the idea of using money for influence definitely points at higher society. The latter phrase returns to the theme of destructive gossip, so important at the court and in Tibetan society and politics from the earliest times. A significant set of passages is l. 47–49: *bde ba'i tshe na lha myï dran / na ba'i tshe na lha ltos / sdig to myi la lha myi 'go / lha chos thos na dpyas su 'dzin / sha chang mthong na srog kyang bsdo / lha chos byed na' 'on zhing rnegs / sgyu ma'i don myed sun myi 'byin /.../ myï 'i myi grangs phyug kyi chos / sdig yul kun tu btsal myi dgongs / sdig lam gsum las thar myi myong*, "In good times, people don't remember the *lha*, but in times of disease they look to them. *lha* do not sully themselves with sinful people [because] if they hear the *lha chos*, these people will take it that someone is blaming them [for their evil behaviour]. If someone even looks at meat and alcohol, he is risking his life! [However,] if you behave according to *lha chos*, you are teaching and exclaiming [the Dharma].[70] Meaningless illusion will not expose this situation... There is no numbering the people [who have the] religious practices (*chos*) of cattle. Not keeping their minds on searching out spheres of evil (*sdig yul*) everywhere, they will not experience release from the three evil rebirths." Lines 55–56 are a close rephrasing of lines 51–52: "Not practicing *lha chos*, [people] are mad and rush about. The majority of such people are just like 'Dre; not [understanding that they] need to search out spheres of evil everywhere, [the *skandha*s] will be accumulated for their bodies [i.e, they will be reborn]."

Passages such as these seem the ideal expression of the ideology of a social and religious aristocracy which will guide others but continue to be differentiated, by their actions, from the "common people", by which is understood both people not listening to the Buddhadharma as well as those of a "common" nature (*pṛthagjana*). These passages show the birth of Phyi Dar Buddhist morality, as well as the thinking that was done by a group of Buddhists who were part of the nobility, aware of their historical place as the leaders of the Buddhist community in their country, and who wished to maintain their status by continuing to have faith in Buddhism and spread its teachings as they had under the btsan-pos.

Almost exactly the same message is delivered in PT239, also a Buddhist text, except that the venue there is ritual and the symbolisms

it carries, not morality *per se*. Also a strike against bloody sacrifice, the questioning done here is a critique based on both Buddhist doctrine and an acknowledged social differentiation.

PT239.27.4ff reads (cf. MacDonald's rendering at "Une lecture…", p. 375): "The sheep spirit-guide is the tradition of the common people (*myï nag po'ï gzhung*), the custom of the common dead (*shïd nag po 'i lugs*). The Bon teach it, asserting [that this custom consists of] *yas* (i.e., an offering rite closely related to *glud*). According to the tradition which maintains that burnt offerings (for the dead, *gsur*) are for the 'Dre, a sheep is [actually] smarter than a person and it also has more magical power than a person. However, because all sentients are guided by their respective works (*karma*), there is no need whatever for guidance by a sheep. It is also not necessary to cut open a sheep [to search for omens]. Sheep can't act as guides! A sheep can't even form a thought! [Indeed, these methods are as useless] as a mutilated hand that can't shoot an arrow, because one [should have] faith in the clear benefit ([*m*]*ngon don*) [of the Buddha's teachings]; this is the tradition of the correct *lha chos* (*lha chos dkar po'i gzhung*).[71]

"The custom of the (religiously) correct person (*myï dkar po 'i lugs*), with the greatness of the (religiously) correct (*dkar po'i*) dead, being based on the *lha chos dkar po*, a cold *lcags lag*[72] will not enter [the body of the dead sheep]; its inner, warm blood will not be extracted from it; there will be no seizing its vital organs with one's hands, etc." Unfortunately, the second reference to the "correct *lha chos*", on p. 36, line 1, picks up after a break; nevertheless, the flow has been maintained, and the basis for the "correct *lha chos*" is reiterated as consisting of a set of negatives: not killing the sacrificial animal, extracting its organs, etc. The text ends with a metaphorical re-interpretation of this rite, so that one possesses the heart of a fearless yak wherever one is reborn, etc.

What do we make of these passages, criticizing animal sacrifice and the eating of meat, by which are created the sufferings which help create the *sdig yul* of PT126? Such general moral advice might not seem to be aimed at an aristocratic level of society. However, this call for empathy and a certain level of asceticism and self-restraint is something that would be most achievable by those with the means to find alternatives for living, one of which would be to enter a monastery. (It also shows that, economically, at least some nobility were well-off enough to abjure traditional Tibetan values and embark on a very different path, such as vegetarianism. This is similar to what some Uyghur nobles, on the same basis, did in the process of becoming Manichaeans.)

It is interesting that there is no general admonition that *everyone* avoid these rites and practices in either document. Perhaps it was assumed that the common people would continue to perform them, while the true nobility would abstain from them. The constant play on the symbolism of white and black here reminds one of its great application—throughout Central Asia as well as in Tibet—as a descriptor dividing nobility and plebian status, in everything from 'bone' and hair color ("the black-headed ones") to inner qualities. The attitude in these texts is that, although many will pursue these bloody practices, those who have *lha chos* will avoid them. The phrase *lha chos dkar po* further suggests that some, perhaps many, noble families and clans were still adhering to these older practices. The taunting criticism of the intellectual abilities of sheep shows that this is certainly not an academic treatise, or a confident assertion of principles known and accepted by a majority of the populace. In some way, these texts represent the beginnings of a Buddhist moralism that was completed with the invitation of Atiśa to Tibet and the spread of his teachings.

An issue of great importance, to judge from several post-Imperial Dunhuang texts, was preserving for the nobility (and presumably the families of btsan-pos as well, though they are in the background in several of them) a fate after death that was special to them. Making them happy as ancestors (*pha mes kyi dge*) was asserted as an important goal of society by Khri Srong Lde Brstan above. Much of PT239 as well as one of the texts studied by Yoshiro Imaeda in his *Histoire du cycle de la naissance et de la mort: étude d'un texte tibétain de Touen-houang* are concerned with *lha yul du lam bstan pa*. It is in these documents that the juxtaposition of Buddhist values with old Tibetan beliefs, as well as the transposition (*bsngo ba*) of newer Buddhist vocabulary for older terms, comes out most clearly. (This has been well described by Imaeda on p. 76f.) PT126 connects practicing *lha chos* with Buddhist values in a way that seems to displace *lha yul* as the goal of religious practice; the texts in *Histoire* show how to use Buddhist means to accomplish these goals for the nobility. In these and other documents, the very fact that the goal is *lha yul* makes it clear that a reunion with ancestral *lha* is one reward of practicing *lha chos*. The only element that changes, apparently, is *where* this goal is. The inscriptions make it clear that the Btsan-pos descended from *gnam* to rule, and returned to it at death. This idea goes out in these documents.[73] This is one example of the absorption of *lha* into Buddhist cosmology, as

the phrase in PT218, in plate one in *Histoire* (*khams gsum 'phrul pa lha 'ï rje*) shows. The ancestors of the btsan-pos and the nobility are simultaneously elevated and homogenized with the myriad deities and spirits of the Hindu-Buddhist world. Later in that text, in plate three, we find a figure, one Lha 'Dre Rje, a metaphorical representative of one of the two great generic groupings of spiritual beings in Phyi Dar Tibet, the *lha 'dre* and *lha srin*. This text provides perhaps our earliest example of differently nuanced uses of *lha* in close proximity. By this time, however, many who were being taught this text may already have lacked the interest or cultural memory to distinguish them—these documents were likely composed long after the Imperium fell. Parallel to the enormous (Rnying-ma) literature which was developing at that time to express the sameness of all spiritual beings in Buddhist ritual, the original meaning of the term was being preserved in the political and social reservoir of the Tibetan psyche. Still today, *lha* is used—recognized—as a classifier of the nobility in titles (*lha btsun*, e.g.) and non-religious materials.

The category *lha 'dre*, perhaps in its earliest citation in the above quote, foretells the fate of the once powerful ancestral spirits of the btsan-pos whose power had supported the Imperium. Without those leaders, and in a world now oriented towards a Buddhist cosmology, they became (apparently rather quickly) just another class of spiritual beings. Their previous special status is revealed in authentically old documents such as the inscriptions, where *lha* are not mentioned in common with other classes of spirits. It is doubtful that they were considered to be much like them, except they seem to have been considered as temperamental as other classes of Tibetan spiritual beings. We know from old documents, especially PT1047, and modern anthropological research, that they sometimes had arbitrary attitudes, and this led to their unpredictable behaviour. Their special status as ancestors of the btsan-pos does not seem to have excluded this. After the Imperium fell, their status fell—perhaps in part *because* of the failure of the Imperium—and the care of these ancestral guides fell into the hands of Buddhists. Having been equated with *deva*s, which are not much thought of in Buddhist cosmology and doctrine, later Buddhists tended to see them as inferior. The categories *lha 'dre* and *lha srin* show us that the post-Imperial Buddhist community did not wish to accord too high a status to these spirits. Perhaps, in the beginning, they worried that if they did, it could

become the basis for a cult which would again subjugate the Sangha to a national (or at least broadly-accepted) leader. The potential for this problem arose at other courts in Asia, and was dealt with in a similar way by the Sanghas there.[74]

Finally, this re-categorization also allowed the manipulation of the *lha* by early Tantrics (e.g., the Rnying-ma-pa).[75] This may have been an intended consequence of the process Khri Srong Lde Brtsan initiated when he assigned so many of his ritual affairs to Buddhists. We have no evidence at all that, before Buddhist monks, any special group took *lha* into their care, save perhaps for the Sku Bla. (This sets up the possibility that, if there was a great conflict at the courts of the btsan-pos between religious practitioners, it may have been between them.) The advantages of such an amelioration of ancestral status for the *lha* and the promise of control over them must have appealed to Khri Srong Lde Brtsan as a ruler in search of stability and a secure status.

Conclusions

This reconstruction of the basic orientations of the Imperium to the unseen land of spiritual ancestors and related social and political realities must be considered to a certain extent hypothetical. We possess no documents which outline this system in detail. What makes this analysis useful, and testable, is that it provides a consistent interpretation of complex terms which were used in social, political and religious environments spanning a long period of time. The insufficiency of simple, generic religious terms imported from the West to describe their value and function has been known for some time by a few students in the field, but has largely been overlooked for a variety of reasons.

If the assumption underlying the interpretations here is accurate, that these terms were polyvalent so as to hold politico-religious meaning for realities on earth as well as in a land of guiding ancestral spirits, then we also come to appreciate another fact that has been known, if dimly, for quite some time. That is, that the spirit world—the essential *spirit-uality*, you might say—of the Tibetans was quite distinct from that of the Indic and Chinese peoples. In the first chapter, we saw how that world reflected (and still reflects) the tremendous sense of hierarchy which imbues Tibetan society. These fundamentally different characteristics have certainly impeded Indologists and Sinologists who sought to interpret Buddhism in Tibet, and Tibetan religion in general, in terms of systems they were familiar with.

The vocabulary studied in this chapter worked in that hierarchical system. Even among the *lha* there seems to have been a discernable hierarchy (the *lha* of the nobility, of the btsan-po, and of the imperial ancestors seem to have been subtly different, and they were clearly arranged in a power relationship). The use of *sku* to explain the dual nature of the btsan-pos as rulers presumably had some relationship with this hierarchy, but these systems could as easily have functioned independently. Much more research is needed on this point.

We began this chapter with brief expositions that sought to emphasize how, as we look into Tibet's past for keys to its religious and political structures, we find no corollary set of data from cultures which have been asserted to have languages closely, and even divergently, related to Tibetan. Differences in the religions and cultures of the Tibetans, Chinese and Burmese support the view that their languages are, at best, only distantly related. It is especially disappointing that the earliest stages of these languages are not well known or studied, so the data that could help us understand the early religion and society of the Tibetans in relation to their closest neighbors is lacking. This leaves our richest source of material that which was discussed in Chapter One, data from early Mediaeval Eurasian courts, many of which were Indo-European or expressed an Indo-European political ideology. Even though some of the key terminology studied in this chapter is unquestionably old and legitimately "Tibeto-Burman", whatever that might ultimately mean, the conceptions behind them largely fit well into such a system. This linguistic data, then, reinforces the conclusion drawn from the materials studied in the first chapter: The "Proto-Tibetan" peoples, with their descendents, were for some period strongly influenced by things Indo-European. How and over what precise period this happened is still unclear, but it is obvious that it is an important element of Tibet's unique political and religious structures.

Methodological observations

Understanding the bivalence of terms such as *sku*, *bla*, and *lha* is methodologically and historically useful. Most world religions spread by absorbing conceptions and vocabulary they found in place, at first overlaying and mixing, and ultimately replacing, earlier meanings with their own. Celtic deities and Roman offices were adapted to Christianity and then became Christian. Early Turkic translations of the Qur'ān

spoke of *Tengri* rather than Allāh. We are fortunate to be in the position to have Tibetan documents which present many important religious and political terms in a variety of contexts. We learn from studying them that un-annotated definitions do not suffice, and that we cannot assume to understand beliefs in the Imperial period only through recourse to later traditions. We can only understand them better by analyzing the contexts in which they were used as thoughtfully as we can.

Adhering to a chronologically-based analysis helps us understand better changes in meanings these terms have undergone over a long period of time. Such changes are to be expected in a political system that lasted longer than that of the United States, and we should be mindful that the Imperium was an organic structure. For example, the four earliest inscriptions, all from the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, show differences in style which may well have carried with them subtle changes in the use of terms that we cannot appreciate today. And, of course, they are valuable evidence for the evolution of that ruler's understanding and use of Buddhism. Since we remain ignorant of the precise period during which Buddhism became a significant presence at the courts of the btsan-pos, emic traditions notwithstanding, we still have no good idea under what specific political and social circumstances these terms were matched with, and began to transit from, whatever "pre-Buddhist" meanings they may have had to those we see in documents from the late Imperial period and the early Phyi Dar, during which time the meanings of many of them were fixed for the modern period.

Endnotes

[1] Heather Karmay, "Tibetan costume, seventh to eleventh centuries", in *Essais sur l'art du Tibet* (Paris: Librarie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1977), p. 64, illustrates the clear Iranian influence in dress and accoutrements at Srong Btsan Sgam-po's court. Other evidence from antiquity on Persian-Tibetan trade and cultural connections: P. Denwood, "A Greek bowl from Tibet", *Iran*.11.1973.121–127; A. Heller, "The silver jug of the Lhasa Jokhang", at *www.asianart.com/articles*, and references there, and S.J. Czuma, "Some Tibetan and Tibet-related acquisitions of the Cleveland Museum of Art", *Oriental art*. 38.1993.231–243. The Iranian styles are mostly identifiable as Sogdian or Sassanid.

The "cuirass of light" of the btsan-pos, mentioned in Chapter One—which must have been so named from its color as well as reflective nature—bears a physical similarity to the "sun shield" studied by A.S. Melikian-Chirvani ("The Iranian sun shield", Bulletin of the Asia Institute.n.s.6.1992). There is also similarity in that both are symbols of kingship. The breast-plate, or cuirass, which was an emblem of the emperor/btsan-po with "its golden halo of glory" (p. 5), functioned naturally as a statement of his "solar majesty". Tibetan troops also wore them, where their value was very likely as magical as practical, since areas of the torso remained exposed around them. One problem with

this analysis is that solar symbolism is not currently known to have been significant in the Imperium. However, this must be balanced with known Iranian influences in Tibet, especially during Srong Btsan Sgam-po's reign, and with the essentially solar nature of Avalokiteśvara. (This point will be addressed in Chapter Four.)

What symbolism may have been attached to the cuirass of a btsan-po depends, in part, on whether armor used by others in Tibet's proximate world was invested with such values. Then it becomes interesting to consider these values within Buddhist belief. This military emblem had political significance for Buddhist rulers at that time because of the connection of the sun-shield with such a ruler (i.e., a Cakravartin—as any devout Buddhist king may be considered), which has been found in the ruins of a 7th/8th century site in Afghanistan. (On this, see the discussion at Melikian-Chirvani, *op. cit.*, p. 14f; see also p. 32: "The very appearance of the sun conjured up to the Iranian mind the image of a golden shield". This, in turn, was a symbol of royalty and conquest.) The more detailed description of the cuirass at MA ṆI BKA' 'BUM.199v-200r speaks of Srong Btsan Sgam-po's *gser khrab* studded with various jewels, as well as with an image of a *lha*. If this is true (and there is no reason to believe it is), that image would almost certainly have been of a Buddhist deity, for we have no information that ancestral *lha* were represented pictorially. (In Chapter Four, n. 5, we will speculate as to how Avalokiteśvara might have been the spiritual being intended in the symbolism of this sun-shield.)

We at least need to understand why such cuirasses, again mostly of symbolic value, were worn by Tibetan soldiers into this century. (For a few examples of these "mirrors", which are sometimes found in an ensemble called the *me long bzhi*, see *Warriors of the Himalayas*, p. 126 and 129f) The gold coloring and foiling on these examples show its persistence in this tradition. Tibetan troops also had gold chain-mail, *gser gyi a lung*, clearly only of ceremonial value, which again reminds us of Scythian decorative art and ceremonial custom.)

[2] The origin of Indo-European elements in Tibetan culture, to be explained satisfactorily, must be connected with the "Proto-Tibetan" language and peoples and their probable homeland. They most likely met in an area of Gansu and Qinghai that had early been occupied by at least one branch of Indo-European peoples, the Tokharians, as well as being later visited by more than one Iranian people. Its fertile valleys and easy passageways have supported it until today as an active *Sprachbund* region, an area where languages converge and share characteristics. A recent study gives us an example of how this "area of convergence" worked in the ethnogenesis of the Monguor peoples: Keith Slater, *A grammar of Mangghuer: a Mongolic language of China's Qinghai-Gansu Sprachbund* (London & New York: RoutledgeCurzon. 2003); see especially p. 6ff. Note on p. 9 his observations on the inadvisability of pegging this people and their language of today to any putative ethnic origin. He might have been speaking as well about the Tibetans, whose few features in common with Chinese are best explained by convergence in approximately the very same area. (For an overview of Chinese-Indo-European contacts, see Edward Pulleyblank, "Chinese and Indo-Europeans".JRAS.1966.9–39.)

On the Tibetan examples cited here and on other points of comparison, see C.I. Beckwith, "Toward a Tibeto-Burman theory", *Medieval Tibeto-Burman languages II*, Leiden, 2006, pp. 32–33, and the same author, "Old Tibetan and the dialects and periodization of Old Chinese", *op. cit.*, p. 179ff.) Much further work is needed, especially with respect to identification of the possible donor languages. This approach would give us a way to orient ourselves toward some of the shared Chinese and Tibetan vocabulary as well as the history of civilization in their common border areas.

In contrast to the "Sino-Tibetan theory", briefly critiqued below, with its lack of reference to any common culture or artifacts attesting to the existence of a people who might represent some common "Sino-Tibetan" stage, we have a plethora of evidence from Xinjiang, Mongolia, Southern Siberia and adjacent areas of an Indo-European

presence nearly one thousand years older than the first "Chinese" dynasty. Those adhering to the "Sino-Tibetan theory" of divergent relationship have ignored, and continue to ignore, the implications of such a long-term, diversified presence of Indo-European peoples at the time of Chinese, as well as Tibetan, ethnogenesis. This is certainly a warning flag about the soundness of their approach.

[3] The term is used by Anthony Smith in *The ethnic origins of nations*, p. 30, as an equivalent of 'ethnic community'. Tibetan ethnogenesis does not seem to match precisely many of the examples he describes there, although the following characteristics may be expanded upon to help find a place in categories for them:

On p. 85, Smith points to the role of the comitatus, without using the term by name, when he cites examples of "warrior nobilities" which reinforced the ethnic identity of clans in a tribal confederation. He believes they hindered greater unity: "Even political divisions among tribal lines failed to eradicate this popular ethnic identity". Tibet certainly could have been an example of this, but his point would have been more persuasive had he understood the role of the comitatus in the Turkic, Persian and Mongolian societies he cites there as examples.

On p. 43, he makes an observation that seems central to understanding early Tibetan Plateau society. "If the *ethnie*...constitutes a majority of the population of the polity, if, for example, it constitutes a patrimonial kingdom or forms the core of a wider agrarian empire, then its ethnic myths and symbols will reflect the elements of political domination and kingship, and its conduits of ethnic communication will include officials, judges and officers alongside the priests and scribes which are common to all pre-modern ethnic communication. They will diffuse, along with other myths of origin and ancestry, *myths of kingship and nobility, of royal lineage and political domination*, as part of the ethnic fund, and the symbolism of the community will reflect the centrality of this political experience." (Italics are mine. In Chapter One, we pointed to the highly vertical structure of Imperium society, and how natural it would have been for Buddhist monks from the nobility to be important communicators of its values. Smith's observations seem a good starting point for the analysis of the relationship of Buddhist and other religious beliefs to the very construction itself of Tibetan society.)

[4] The inception of the "Phyi Dar" is difficult to determine. It depends on which event of the "refounding" of Buddhism, most of which cannot be dated closely, one considers crucial. See R. Vitali, *Early temples of Central Tibet*, p. 62 for a brief note.

I use "Phyi Dar" here not to refer so much to a long period of early post-Imperial Tibet, but to that interval during which there was born what we know today as Tibetan culture. This would be that brief period when there was a change in the psyche of Buddhist practitioners in Tibet that oriented them almost exclusively toward spiritual and written resources outside of Tibet, especially in India. Seen from another viewpoint, this was the period when Buddhist values of the Imperium were abandoned, except by the Rnying-ma-pa (according to their view). The present work takes it as a given that the collapse of the Imperium was the impetus for this spiritual redirection. The "Phyi Dar" thus marks as much as anything a sign of the lack of confidence of the Tibetans in their ability to make their way through the world—including their practice of Buddhism—on their own spiritual and political resources. This, I believe, was the principal cause for the formation of an independent structure for Tibetan Buddhism along patterns found in normative Buddhist resources translated from Indic languages, such as the Vinaya. This was, of course, both enabled and required by the fall of the Imperium and the removal of the figure of the btsan po.

[5] Evidence for this is found both in contemporary anthropological and linguistic research and historical sources (e.g., R. Vitali, "The role of clan power in the establishment of religion (from the *kheng log* of the 9th-10th century to the instances of the dByil of La stod and gNyos of Kha rag)", pp. 105–157, uses early Phyi Dar sources to give us details about the fragility of Tibetan unity and the role of local power in the fall of the Imperium.). All evidence suggests that no btsan-po found a way to vitiate the

independence of the noble clans by, e.g., creating a center of loyalty absolutely beyond their own definitions. The oathing system was the central mechanism for dealing with this issue, but Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's efforts to place it in, or modify it, through Buddhist institutions was not, eventually, effective. No later Buddhist tradition was successful, either, which is evidenced by centuries (into the seventeenth) of Rnying-ma-pa efforts to "evangelize" border peoples (see the works of Kaḥ-thog Tshe-dbang Nor-bu and others), and Dge-lugs-pa efforts to reduce local, semi-autonomous entities to their control. The early Bka'-gdams-pa tradition was foremost in adapting elements of late Imperial Buddhist rituals for use in at post-Imperial courts; some examples, such as confession rites, can be seen in Chapter Three. This worked on a local level, but perhaps also prevented them from developing a strategy which could have been applied on a broader level that might have contributed to a national unity.

[6] An example of a recent effort at a thorough analysis is an online draft, "Word order in Tibeto-Burman languages", by Matthew S. Dryer, April 2000, 62 p. It does not support any modern view of the relationships between these languages. Students of these various languages and dialects have, it appears, to choose between these sources and the hypothetical reconstructions of, *e.g.*, J. Matisoff in his *Handbook of Proto-Tibeto-Burman: system and philosophy of Sino-Tibeto-Burman reconstructions*. Needless to say, reconstructions based on a narrow set of data and with an arbitrary selection of language elements to choose to consider as significant, or even decisive, is lacking in discipline, and cannot provide the basis for sound reasoning. (For example, reconstruction was possible in Indo-European studies only after the important characteristics of the older literary languages had been thoroughly compared and correspondences established. This was, of course, an easier task than dealing with a mixture of literate and pre-literate peoples. However, linguistic history shows that divergence among related languages is not a difficult thing to prove. The harder it is to demonstrate, the less likely the results will be valid or convincing.)

Most weak theories are one-legged. What makes Matisoff's title—and effort—presumptuous is that he believes language relationships can be "proved" by concentrating on a selective, "reconstructed" vocabulary (an obsession among students of "Sino-Tibetan") when nearly all other categories of the languages differ (some elements clearly shown in the Dryer study, above). As far as I know, not a single "Tibeto-Burman" language, including Tibetan, has been studied thoroughly and diachronically, so no sound basis for comparison among any of these languages exists. Of the "Sino-Tibetan" languages, even Chinese is no exception, since Karlgren's reconstructions, the basis for the modern "Sino-Tibetan" theory, have gone from the "acceptable" to the "unacceptable" category, and have been largely superseded in the work of Starostin (A.C. Старостин. Реконструкция древнекитайской фонологической системы, Moscow, 1989.).

Good critiques and alternative visions for "Sino-Tibetan" may be found in, among other publications: R.A. Miller, "The Sino-Tibetan hypothesis", *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica*.59.1988.509–540, and C.I. Beckwith, "Toward a Tibeto-Burman theory" and "Old Tibetan and the dialects and periodization of Old Chinese", both in *Medieval Tibeto-Burman linguistics II* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 1–38 and 179–200, respectively. It's not a bad thing to remember here that even Paul Benedict, the first to organize some of the necessary data for studying these languages, believed that Chinese and Tibetan were, if anything, only distantly related (*Sino-Tibetan: a conspectus*, Cambridge, 1972, p. 2). The more distant a relationship, the more difficult it is to prove in a satisfying manner, of course. This makes his later, hardened stance, again driven by vocabulary, with only a smattering of phonetics and no concern for any other language features, the more regrettable. (P. Benedict, "Sino-Tibetan: another look". JAOS.96.1976.167–197.) Thus was a religion born.

[7] Note the interesting remarks in the online journal, *Rethinking Tibeto-Burman-2*, at *www.questhimalaya.com/journal.*

[8] One is reminded of Gerard Clauson's observation in the preface to his *Essays in Turkish and Mongolian studies*, p. xiii: "As a young man I had always accepted the theory that the Turkish and Mongolian languages were genetically related…and so when a Romanized text of the *Secret history of the Mongols*, a work I did expect to interest me, became available, I tried to read it. I did not begin to understand it, and I could find nothing Turkish about the language in which it was written. And so I came to the conclusion that the theory that the Turkish and Mongolian languages were genetically related…was almost certainly wrong…" Human intuition is the basis of much good scholarly effort. Why does it not seem intuitive that Tibetan and Chinese languages, with their shared, ancient Indo-European lexical contents, murky early histories, and many obvious categorical differences on a variety of levels, are best assumed to be sharing areal features and much vocabulary because they have been neighbors for over two thousand years? Physical proximity provides a simpler explanation (Ockham's razor applied) and is easier to demonstrate, as became the case in the analysis of the relation between the Turkic and Mongolian languages.

Another cogent observation in a very different direction was made by a linguist in a work the title of which I unfortunately do not remember. He noted that, if an objective observer were to look at the modern Greek and Swedish languages, the idea that they descended from a common ancestor would be difficult to entertain. Even this observation applies, in reverse, to efforts to relate Chinese and Tibetan by descent: When we go back into these languages as far as we can with any certainty, no major features of these languages become more similar. The further we go back into the history of the Swedish and Greek languages, the more dots arise that we can connect to relate them to different branches on the same family tree.

The best course for this floundering area, in my judgment, would be to engage in a considerable amount of sober reflection on the difficult issue at hand—reconstructing Chinese phonology according to purely linguistic methods, despite the difficulties raised by its writing system. If this could be done, a sufficient body of data would arise organically which would create a sound basis from which any divergent relationship with other languages could be better assessed.

[9] C.I. Beckwith, "Old Tibetan and the dialects and periodization of Old Chinese", *op. cit.* n. 6.

[10] Among the results of stringency is that cultural closeness or distance can be judged more accurately. We can then understand the meanings of words in adjacent or presumably related languages in their cultural contexts, rather than merely seeing them as de-contextualized atoms of data which may be used to demonstrate abstract points and reconstructed by scholars to fit a certain theory.

[11] It is one thing for proponents of a "theory" to *defend* it as strongly as reason allows (of course, after defining terms and categories clearly) within the rules of their own discipline. It is another for them to feel, in their arrogance, as if they have solved nearly impossible difficulties by simply ignoring them in clever ways. This has become a common attitude in "Sino-Tibetan" studies. Note the self-satisfied cleverness in L. Sagart's discovery of the *being right, after all* attitude in his review of Matisoff's *Handbook of Proto-Sino-Tibetan* in *Diachronica*.23.2006, p. 207f. As observed elsewhere, this is evidence of the effete attitude of those "playing the game", or "following the religion", as Sagart reveals with his intonation of "the Benedictian tradition" on p. 207. Being orthodox to the "theory" is more important than critiquing it, seeing that it is presented intelligibly, or rendering it practical value.

Sagart's "discovery" is also an example of the desperation in this area. He finds the common link, the "proof" of Sino-Tibetan in—Austronesian! Now we really have a set of common languages and cultures! Rather than adding to an orderly pattern of similarities and the consistent application of a simple set of analyses, this further diffuses them. What is next—finding the missing link in Korean, Japanese, Ainu?

The weakness of such appeals, of course, is that all data from outside Chinese and Tibetan languages must be supportive of a principal, underlying hypothesis about their

relationship whose core evidence is strong and stands on its own. Data from beyond this central nexus is expected, by the laws of argument, to be more diffuse, complementary, and weaker. There is no way to "prove" the relationship of two divergent languages by reference to others whose relationship is more remote. If the evidence is so weak in the first place, it will not be sufficiently strengthened by arguments of analogy, bits of data from the neighborhood, or structures which languages in the region share that have no provable origin and thus are areal features. All these points helped to render the "Altaic" theory untenable. At present the same verdict appears to apply to Chinese and Tibetan as divergent languages.

[12] Cf. C.I. Beckwith, "Old Tibetan and the dialects and periodization of Old Chinese", *op. cit*., p. 1n: "One of the reasons for the tenacity with which good scholars support the received theories and methodologies may be the desire for some semblance of order amidst the seeming chaos and overwhelming quantity of Old Chinese and Tibeto-Burman data. Another problem may be the lack of a critical mass of trained scholars to work on and discuss the material." On p. 4n he adds, "A few linguists specializing in East and Southeast Asian languages have confided to me privately that they have grave doubts about the 'Sino-Tibetan' theory, but do not want to be personally attacked for expressing their views."

One of the attitudes in this scholarship, as in the Sagart quote above, is the "we've just got to tweak this system to make it work" syndrome. The idea of actually dropping back and seriously re-examining presuppositions to achieve something substantial—with the modesty and reflection it would require—is, sadly, lacking.

[13] P. Benedict, "The gods of Sino-Tibetan", AOC.51.1990.161–171. This is an examination of some religious vocabulary in "Sino-Tibetan" languages with a smattering of speculations. It centers on the significance of the sun/day moon/night opposition in "Sino-Tibetan" vocabulary. It is not a lot worse than many such articles by linguists working on various language groupings who have written on religion, but it again shows that they often have trouble relating their work to the real world (there isn't a single quotation from a religious document or reference to a religious belief in the article); like some social scientists and others, they believe that the real world is only real when viewed through their Weltanschauung. It also shows that not really knowing the languages involved reduces our understanding of words as cultural artifacts. Perhaps that is why we have learned so little about the religions of the Chinese, Tibetan and Burmese peoples through studies by linguists in the field, whether they accept or reject "Sino-Tibetan" or "Tibeto-Burman".

[14] On this motif see the review article of D.N. Keightley, "Graphs, words, and meanings…". JAOS.117.1997.507–524, and J.A. Matisoff, "Stars, moon and spirits: bright beings of the night in Sino-Tibetan". *Gengo kenkyu*.77.1980.1–45. The former article coherently introduces us to early (Oracle bone) evidence for the above-mentioned agrarian ritual sacrifices and their solar dimensions, citing passages frequently. The latter article is another example of what can happen when a linguist thinks he is informing us about the philological dimensions of a religious phenomenon. In this case, it is combined with the "Sino-Tibetan" fetish for analyzing lexical items alone; there is exactly one brief quotation, one with no religious context or apparent meaning. We *may* be learning something important about early Chinese astral religious beliefs, but the author is more concerned that we understand the wholeness of the "Sino-Tibetan" vocabulary, which as he sees it is oriented around the Chinese system. Of course, nothing similar to what he is trying to establish can be found in Tibetan sources (except, of course, to the extent that having religious beliefs about astral phenomena is about as non-distinctive a category as one can find in the world of religious studies).

[15] The following works are dedicated, exclusively or partly, to the study of Tibet's honorific language:

C.I. Beckwith, "Your honorable tea", Chapter Seven of *Phoronyms: classifiers, class nouns, and the pseudopartative construction* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007); Scott DeLancey, "Semantic categorization in Tibetan honorific nouns". *Anthropological*

linguistics.40.1998.109–123; Kitamura Hajime, "The honorifics in Tibetan". *Acta asiatica*.29.1975.56–74; and, Anatole Lyovin, "Nominal honorific compounds in Tibetan". *Mon-Khmer studies*.20.1992.45–56.

[16] Cf. WALTER & BECKWITH.1998. Note that we have both *bang so* and *sku bang so* (also *mkhar* and *sku mkhar*; see as well *rim gro* and *sku'i rim gro*, below), indicating that the very nature of the tomb could be changed by the status of the remains in it. There is thus a relationship between the sacred presence (*sku*) of the dead and the body (*pur*/*spur*) within the tomb. The continuing presence of the *sku* of the btsan-po and its significance for the Imperium would have been the reason for the annual and other rites performed at the *bang so*s of the btsan-pos.

[17] The phrase *gnam du gshegs* is found in later historical works. There, it is used to describe the death of figures such as Chingis Qan, presumably because he was not considered to have been a Buddhist, so a Buddhist heaven was not accessible to him. This may be the survival of an ancient concept that any figure of sufficient stature was considered to possess the charismatic power warranting a fate equal to that of the btsan-pos. (Of course, it also had the political function of elevating the origin of the ancestors of the now-Buddhist Mongols in their relations with Tibet.)

At least two questions are raised at this point. One is, does the phrase *gnam du gshegs* tell us that post-Imperial Tibetans conceived that leaders of other peoples were also seen to return to a heaven, rather than to die as ordinary human beings do? Another is, what was this "heaven" like for the ancient Tibetans? Today, *dgung* and *gnam* are usually considered to be synonyms, but we cannot assert this for the Imperial period. The latter may have been a pluralistic concept—a heaven for each ancestral btsan-po?—since seven and nine *gnam* are mentioned once in an Old Tibetan source. Also, we need to keep in mind the frequent phrase in old sources, *gnam gyi ya bla dgung gi ya stengs na*…For the political significance of *gnam*, see n. 61. (We note in passing that *gnam* is not a word shared by Tibetan and Burmese languages.)

[18] See n. 24 for the example of *sku*, which occurs in a variety of word lists. On the assertion about honorific elements perhaps being borrowed, see the article of Anatole Lyovin, "Nominal honorific compounds in Tibetan", p. 47, yet also read his conclusion on p. 54: "It would seem that the development of Tibetan honorifics was not in any way influenced by any other language or languages". The fact that the author presupposes that we know what the "Tibetan language(s)" was at some time before, say, 600 C.E., illustrates that few people have grasped the essence of the polylingual, polyethnic confederation. In other ways, his point certainly seems correct. It would have been quite easy at some earlier time—before literacy and Chinese interest give us any indication—for a small subgroup within the nascent confederation to either impose its own language of authority, or to appropriate the political metalanguage of a dominant group and use it when they took power. Whether this vocabulary originally belonged to the people we now call the Tibetans is not known. All we really know is that *sku*, perhaps the central concept of the Imperium, is an ancient word, shared among some Tibetan and other Tibeto-Burman languages.

[19] Cf. Kitamura (*op. cit*. n. 15), p. 63 concerning its use by the *sku drag*, the modern term for the nobility. As the btsan-pos had subsumed the "noble" clans under them, so too the families of the Dalai Lamas headed the Lhasa nobility; cf. Peter, Prince of Greece & Denmark, *The aristocracy of Central Tibet*. Since there already was an honorific system in place, it was expanded to accommodate this new hierarchy.

[20] Isolated examples may be brought forward. Old Tibetan *lam lha*, a 'god of paths/ways' is lexically equivalent to the Turkic phrase *yol tngri*, but this might simply be a coincidence of beliefs. Reference is again made to the interesting remarks of Dan Martin in his *Mandala cosmology, op. cit*., p. 66f, but with the caveat that the vocabulary items there have significance in the Bon tradition, not in Tibet's central political structure as seen in its religio-political documents. To this we may add a parallel phrase with Imperial implications: In the Phyong Rgyas bridge inscription

(RICHARDSON.H.1985.38) we read that it is a *nam zhig rdo rings*, which has a meaning very similar to the Turk's term for their inscriptions, *bengü taş*. Both mean "unchanging (or, eternal) stone".

[21] One notable instance could be the name for Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's "family" monastery and complex, Bsam-yas. It may well be a calque of a Chinese Buddhist term meaning "beyond thought".

[22] The Mongol strategy was most commonsensical, considering the disproportionate ratio of Turkic army population to that of its Mongol officers. For the sake of communication on the battlefield, commanders had to use terms immediately understandable by their troops.

[23] Although the terminology was used before his reign, he was somehow responsible for seeing that it was a conscious emblem of status to be applied systematically to the nobility as Buddhists. That *gtsug lag* was a flexible concept in the hands of the btsan-po of the moment will be shown in Chapter Four.

[24] The "Tibeto-Burman" form is reconstructed by P. Benedict as **(s-)kəw* (*Sino-Tibetan: a conspectus*, p. 184), with Tibetan *sku* and Burmese *kui(y)*. There are three reconstructed forms in J. Matisoff, *Handbook of Proto-Tibeto-Burman* p. 595. The closest to Tibetan of the forms given by Matisoff is in a later index to this work, **s-kÉ(tm)w*, to which he assigns the meanings "body" or "corpse". Something must have happened on the way to its use in Tibetan, though, because *if* Matisoff is correct about these meanings, there seems nothing honorific about them. On this see n. 33.

sku does not seem to be related to any other Tibetan vocabulary item, but one could speculate on the concept of the thread (*skud*). Could these terms be related because of a common meaning related to a drawn, thread-like nature or capability? We think here of the significance of threads and thread constructions as religious symbols among Himalayan cultures. In at least one instance, *skud* may have been written for *sku* (PT1068.93). It is difficult to determine whether this has significance, or is only an orthographic variant. Old Tibetan *skun mkhar* and *skung mkhar* are also orthographic variants.

If we knew better the semantic range of OT *dku*['], which is understood contextually in the phrases *dku' la gthogs pa* and *dku' rgyal* (on which see Chapter One), we might see this as a related term. It is closely related to *sku* in that it also refers to the body, specifically the side of the lower trunk, in CWT.

[25] DeLancey (*op. cit.* n. 15), p. 113 and Kitamura (*op. cit.* n. 15), p. 73.

[26] Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's two bodies: a study in medieval political theology*, originally published in 1957. The reader should especially note pp. 15f in the 1997 edition.

[27] The meaning of the terms *sku ring* and *sku tshe* and their importance for understanding the "sacral person" of the Btsan-po can be found in: M. Walter, "From Old Tibetan *ring* to classical Tibetan *ring bsrel*: notes on the terminology for the eminent deceased in early Tibet", and M. Walter, "The significance of the term *ring lugs*: religion, administration, and the sacral presence of the Btsan-po". *ring* is the most common OT term for "reign period", i.e., the "length of the *sku*" in space; as with so many such terms, its meaning is determined from context, by connotation. See RICHARDSON.H.1985.76, line 23, for one example.

Particularly clear examples of uses of *rings pa* as a verbal can be found at PT1287.456, PT1290.r010, and DTH.120 (translated at DTH.166).

[28] Hermann Kulke has shown throughout his works that "divine kingship" in India was not limited to either Hinduism or Buddhism, and this should be a lesson. We are not dealing so much with a Zeitgeist as with a ongoing concept. Buddhists at courts must have felt free to adapt any local concepts to its concept of the Cakravartin. (Some confluences with Jain ideas are well known.) We will cite several such instances later in this work. On these generalized notions see H. Kulke, *Kings and cults*, p. 288f. At WALTER.M.2004.170, I assert that *sku*—whatever its philological origins—could have

been a Buddhist concept from an early period, even at the inception of its use. This is, in fact, the best explanation for the consistency of its application. It may have entered early Tibet as a separate element of a Buddhist political theology from either Khotan or Nepal; there are elements of the royal cult of Avalokiteśvara in Nepal today similar to those studied by Kulke in Southeast Asia. We will return to this point in Chapter Four. (This use of *sku* sets Tibetan political theology apart from that of most other peoples of Central Eurasia, as well as we understand their systems.)

[29] Cf. WALTER.M.2004.171, citing a passage the MA ṆI BKA' 'BUM. The discussion here is a development of points made in that article.

[30] This is clear in the Lho Brag inscription in the phase *myï dbri myï snyung ba*. The verb *snyung* is used here to assert that the holdings of a noble will not be physically diminished by the government. [LI & COBLIN.355, text of inscription.] The phrase *sku la snyung/snyun* thus only makes sense in the realm of politics. In his dictionary (BRDA DKROL), Btsan Lha Ngag Dbang Tshul Khrims defines the verbal *bsnyungs pa* only in terms of reduction, reducing to a little. We understand that "illness" and "reduction" are related concepts, and that later *snyun*[*g*] is quite easily understood as an honorific verb for being ill.

[31] PT1285.1184–1186 (a moderately old OT text) contains an extensive vocabulary which may represent a limited development of the basic concept of *sku snyung*. (Limited because the following first, third and fifth terms occur in Old Tibetan materials only in this text.) The special terms used in PT1285 are *bla snyung*, *dbu snyung*, *spyan snyung*, *thugs snyung*, and *phwa snyun*. The meaning of the first two is clear from their context: *Rtsang Rje-po bla snyung dbu snyung yang…spyan snyung blang ma bleng / thugs snyung mang ma mong /…Rtsang Rje phwa snyun kyang bshos*. (This passage incidentally shows that rulers other than the btsan-po were conceived to have *sku*, and that such were conceived to have the same nature and could be affected in the same way.)

Each of the compounds with [*b*]*snyun*[*g*] also has political significance in a system we do not clearly understand, partly because of the bivalency of terms:

In the Zhol inscription (RICHARDSON.H.1985.12), Mes 'Ag Tshoms is not so much *aggrieved* by the Chinese snub, as the term *btsan-pho thugs snyung ba'ï tshe* is rendered there. *thugs* is changeable, can be qualified (Old Tibetan *thugs sgam*), and spatially locatable (Old Tibetan *thugs kyi g.yas g.yos su*). Therefore, it can also "shrink" in the face of a perceived threat; in order to ensure that his *sku* would not also be diminished by the Chinese action—which would damage his *chab srid*—he had to retaliate to show his retainers, his comitatus and others, that his power could maintain the empire.

A brief discursus on *dbu snyung* is appropriate here. It was used in high forms of oathing, one which Btsan-pos and the highest officials participated in to consecrate decisions inscribed for public consumption, as in the Bsam-yas inscription (at RICHARDSON.H.1985.30; better at LI & COBLIN.188): *Btsan-po Yab Sras dang rje blon gun gyis dbu snyung dang bro bor ro* and in the Zhwa'i Lha Khang inscription (RICHARDSON.H.1985.50; cf. LI & COBLIN.266):…*srid bde zhing brtan pa'ï gtsigs gnang ba 'dï / nam nam zha zhar gnang zhïng myi bsgyur myï bcos par / nga'i zha snga nas kyang dbu snyung gnang*…). Of course, this begs the question, how does "head shrinking" fit into the mechanics of swearing an oath?

Violating an oath in the materials studied here—whether international treaties with the Chinese or within the Court—results in death, in whatever terms it is described. In some way, then, when the leaders swear with *dbu snyung*, it is reasonable that their heads will be directly affected. It seems logical that, as shown here, if the Btsan-po's *sku* is huge and elastic, then his other faculties would be, too, if things were going well—which it was understood they would, if he were adhering in good faith to his oaths. Breaking an oath instantly reduced the btsan-po's power (thus, his value and usefulness as a leader), and also rationalizes his removal. Thus, a phrase such as *dbu snyung* would have been a euphemism for more direct political action. We think here of the passage at SECRET HISTORY.¶123 wherein Chingis' comitatus swears, "…If we disobey your commands…cast our black heads on the ground!"

An interesting observation: B. Lincoln (*Death, war, and sacrifice*, p. 203) on Scythian kingship wrote, "beheading was the punishment for anyone convicted of forswearing an oath by the royal hearth, for these were the most solemn oaths, any violation of which would imperil the health of the king and the well-being of the realm...When the Scythians found out that one of their kings, Scyles, had turned apostate...they deposed him from the kingship and replaced him on the throne with his brother, who then had him beheaded...the kingship he had damaged was renewed with the offering of his head." (I'm not sure I understand how Lincoln came to his interpretation of that passage, but it fits the present discussion.) Throughout the Medieval European world as well, beheading was a death penalty reserved for royalty.

We also note that the tradition concerning how one's head may split open as a violation of an oath in India is a conception generally similar to the phrase *dbu snyung*. See here E.W. Hopkins' "The oath in Hindu epic literature", p. 316.

In sum, there is a venerable Indo-European tradition in which, somehow, the head pays the price for the breaking of an oath, and this association likely passed into Tibetan belief.

[32] This is a leitmotif in both early Bka'-gdams-pa and Rnying-ma-pa literature. However, in the former, dependence of the ruler on his Sangha is much more pronounced, in part because of the received Indic tradition of ritual service by Sanghas. The ideal of the latter tradition, on the other hand, was at that time the *sngags pa*, modeled on Padmasambhava, whose relationship with Khri Srong Lde Brtsan in the received tradition reflects a more balanced division of power. See Chapter Four for further comments on this.

[33] We mentioned above that *sku* is a very old word, common to many Tibeto-Burmese languages, meaning "body" and in some modern languages, according to James Matisoff's *Handbook of Proto-Tibeto-Burman* even "corpse". However, in Imperial-period documents *pur* (or *spur*; these variants found in PT1287 and PT1288), is the special term used for the corpse of the btsan-po. *sku* is not used with that meaning.

This dual terminology was required because, with the death of the btsan-po, the *sku* which had inhered in one btsan-po—had been "his" would be an inaccurate description—transferred to his successor when that inheritor reached a certain age. Since the *sku* was coterminous with the Imperium, it could not die. ("The King is dead; long live the King!) Like the categorical title throne (*khri*) it was an abstract concept, eternal and non-individualized, representing the nature of the office rather than of the person.

[34] Of course, by this time *kāya* is understood to refer to "body" only in an exalted manner in conformity with Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine. The very fact that it was calqued by *sku* indicates the translators understood the connotation of each term and the appropriateness of matching them.

The consistent application of the term *sku* from the earliest Old Tibetan sources through its present use as a Buddhist translation term is established. This very consistency, however, presents us with a conundrum that the observant reader may muse upon from time to time in this work, as it is found in various contexts: How can it be that *sku* and *kāya* are such a close fit in meaning? Is this one example that shows Buddhist values were already present much earlier in the Imperium than is generally accepted, that they perhaps even had a role to play in the very development of the concept of *sku*? Or, does it show—as evidence here has been used to assert—that its "original" meanings in Tibetan culture were supplemented and adapted by Buddhists as time went by? I.e., the *sku* = *kāya* equation is the clearest example of the vexing question: Which came first? Because of its proximity to Nepal and Khotan, we cannot dismiss the idea that *sku* had already been ameliorated in meaning through an association with Buddhist doctrines. This needs to be considered, since we have not a single Old Tibetan document, including the inscriptions and the *Annals* in their present recension, which can be shown to have been composed or copied before Buddhism was known to the Imperium—or was already established there in some way. Are such "matches of terms"

as *kāya* with *sku* really evidence that early Tibetan Imperial concepts already relied upon certain Buddhist beliefs about Avalokiteśvara and other Bodhisattvas derived from a complex centered, perhaps, in the Himalayas or northwest Indian culture areas? For example, is the "gigantism" of the Srong Btsan Sgam-po motif in the *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum* described above connected with the Lokottaravāda beliefs thought to have inspired the Bamiyan sculptures and some of the political thinking of the Mahāvastu?

[35] One simple point here, while other points are briefly pursued in Chapter Four: There has been much skeptical scholarship on this point, such as A. MacDonald's "Religion in Tibet at the time of Srong-btsan Sgam-po: myth as history". No such work, to my knowledge, has addressed the fact that even in the inscriptions of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, mention is made of Srong Btsan Sgam-po's support of Buddhism. This means that it was also a common tradition among the populace, probably with the Jo Khang considered physical evidence, else it could not have been so baldly and publically asserted. Secondly, the importance of Avalokiteśvara to Tibetan rulership is an unbroken tradition, supported by some of the very earliest materials produced in and following the reigns of the btsan-pos, such as in certain passages dealing with Khri Srong Lde Brtsan and Ral-pa-can, and in BUDDHAGUHYA. Rather than an obviously later insertion into the earliest Tibetan politico-religious traditions, Avalokiteśvara is seen to be an integral, if not an overwhelming, presence from an early date. (Indeed, no Buddhist spiritual being stands out as central in the Old Tibetan documents, so we must have recourse to archaeological and other research to help us draw provisional conclusions about court realities on this point.)

[36] There are two relatively detailed analyses of the *sku bla*. The earlier is in "Une lecture…", pp. 272–307 especially, and Samten Karmay, "The Tibetan cult of mountain deities and its political significance, pp. 59–73.

[37] Understanding *bla* as "government" is a definition taken from context; the literal meaning of *bla* has always been "upper", "higher", "superior", "authority". Of course, "government" is only one of its important extended meanings, as we shall see.

Those who have seen the functional definition of *bla* to be "government" in the majority of its occurrences in OT political documents include: A. Rona Tas, "Social terms in the list of grants of the Tibetan Tun-huang Chronicle"; G. Uray, "The offices of the *Brung-pa*s and great *Mngan*s and the territorial division of Central Tibet in the early 8th Century"; and, Takeuchi Tsuguhito several times in translations of documents in OTMET, vol. 2. Despite this, many scholars continue to render it "soul" in political and mythological contexts where it really makes no sense and is misleading.

Similarly, in the article cited in n. 36 above, S. Karmay seems unaware of the truly familial nature of the concept of *lha*, and, again, that for 'O Lde Spu Rgyal ('O Lde Gung Rgyal is a later variant), for example, to be simply categorized as a god (i.e., a *lha*) really tells us nothing about that figure. Understanding that he was recognized as a real ancestor by the btsan-pos, a *lha* while alive—as they were—and a *lha* after, in *gnam* 'heaven', helps us see what is essentially a family cosmology in what has been called the "Yar Klung Dynasty". We will take up this point again under *lha* in this chapter.

[38] They are sometimes referred to as *sku bla gnyan po*, "The Severe/Strict/Awesome Sku Bla", which is to say: They should impress by their presence. It would be as if the btsan-po was there. As discussed in n. 42 below, *gnyan/gnyan po* is, indeed, a positive quality for the Sku Bla as far as human beings are concerned.

This interpretation is based on the apparent function of the *sku bla* in the genuinely OT documents studied here: They are important visitors to the 'A-zha and old Shanshan areas outside of Tibet proper; they may have been representing the Imperium, and were evidently meant to impress in much the same way that the btsan-po would if he appeared there. In any event, their travels served the interest of the Imperium somehow—which is why they appear in these requisition, etc., notices—perhaps "showing the flag" in occupied and allied areas; it is even possible that their presence signaled a religious or ritual union of these areas with Tibet. This may be why we have no attested example

of a *sku bla gsol ba* within what we could call the "central" Tibetan Imperium. A. MacDonald'a assertion that they were certainly carried out throughout the Imperium ("Une lecture…", p. 306) is not supported by the evidence.

[39] I.e., they were collected as part of food needed to support the visit of the Sku Bla. If one were considering offerings to spiritual beings alone, most likely meat would be used. This was the accepted medium of sacrifice at other important events such as the oath-renewal and treaty rites described in Chapter One, and the sacrifice of animals was well-known in ancient Tibet, as well as we understand such things. When meat is mentioned as provisions for them, it is in a list with other foods, as at TLTD.386, indicating it is to be consumed, not offered. Other than the phrase *sku la gsol ba*, we have no idea how the "cult" of the *sku bla* was structured.

[40] Because this passage has been interpreted as mythological in much earlier scholarship, it should be kept in mind that, except for the assertion of descent upon a mountain, historical events certainly seem to be at the root of most of the narrative which follows. Indeed, we have no other example in the inscriptions where a mythological narrative dominates; such are mostly relegated to opening passages, where their purpose is to assert the divine origin of the dynasty. I return to the point that the purpose of the inscriptions was to deliver political information concerning real events, save for the origin of the rulership.

The phrase *lha brtsan po*, in this context, is unique and gives us an insight into the religious politics of being a ruler of the Imperium. It basically asserts that one of two brothers (a situation not unique in the search for leadership in the Imperium) becomes "Lha Brtsan-po", while the other, elder brother is assigned rulership over the ancestral homeland. (However, the examples below do not support this, and seem to point to a *primogenitura* principle similar to that followed by the Mongols. Among them, the older brother was the functional ruler while, according to the *Secret History*, the *otcigin* younger brother inherited the "family hearth" and homeland.) These examples point to a pattern whereby the *lha*-ancestral spirit of rule may have proceeded to the younger brother, even if he was not the day-to-day leader of the Imperium. If this is a rule, it distinguishes Tibetan inheritance of power from that of some of its neighbors, such as the rather muddled situation we find among some Turkic peoples, on which see H. Inalcık, "The Ottoman succession and its relation to the Turkish concept of sovereignty", in *The Middle East and the Balkans under the Ottoman rule*, Bloomington, IN, 1993, pp. 37–69 *passim*.

The little data we have from the Imperial period is not much help in understanding this complex but potentially significant point. The opening of the *Annals* (PT1288.7), a prologue of uncertain date designed to fill in details about the rule of Srong Btsan Sgam-po in advance of the chronological, truly annalistic, section, tells us that that ruler was only the *senior* brother and leader (*Btsan-po gcen Srong Rtsan dang / gcung Btsan Srong gnyïs*…). Later, in the section dealing with the rule of Khri-ma Lod, we learn that there was a rivalry for the throne between the *btsan po sras* Rgyal Gtsug Ru, her favorite, and the *btsan po gcen Lha* (PT750.99 and .101), sometimes referred to as Lha Bal-po. The *Annals* indeed refers to *both* as btsan-po, providing the basis for a competition at court which led to a revolt. (This episode is recounted in Christopher Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, p. 69f) The former, preferred by Khri-ma Lod, became the btsan-po Mes Ag Tshoms. The latter, from the description as *gcen*, would have seemed the legitimate successor, to judge by the above example of Srong Btsan Sgam-po, but he was removed from the throne (*btsan po gcen Lha Bal-po rgyal sa nas phab*). More detail of this dual btsan-po structure is found in the passage of the *Chronicle* telling us about the early oathing ceremony which was one of the founding acts of the Imperium. The oaths were taken before not only the btsan-po Slon Mtshan, but also Slon Kol. (PT1287.173: *btsan po Slon Mtshan dang / Slon Kol mched*; the "frère" in the translation at DTH.136 is from PT1287.179, where he is identified as *gcung Slon Kol*.) Finally, one of the most fascinating narratives on the relationship between reli-

gion and politics in the Imperium, the opening of the Rkong-po Inscription, revolves around this same theme. Drï Gum Btsan-po had two sons, *gcen* Nya Khyï and *gcung* Sha Khyï. The *gcung* was entitled *lha btsan po*, while the *gcen* was apparently appointed (in a damaged portion of the inscription) the ruler (*rje*) of Rkong Kar-po, whose title was Kar-po. [LI & COBLIN.198; see also note 17 at .201]

In the above example from the *Chronicle*, Slon Mtshan had the position of *btsan po gcen*, and hence was the dominant ruler. However, oathing was taken before both brothers. Therefore, it is important that we understand this divided leadership if we are to reconstruct both the relationship between these figures and the complex oathing structures and *comitati* that were created by them. Of course, as mentioned above with regard to the *lha*, understanding this political structure is also important if we are to have a clearer idea of the religious dimensions of the office of btsan-po.

It may be helpful in this effort to realize that this structure is also part of the Central Eurasian Culture Complex. Thus, we have some context in which to evaluate this set of offices. We know that the subordinate leadership of a junior male member of the ruling family of a clan is well attested in Central Eurasian politics, going back to the Xiongnu. The Turks had a system of a subordinate *qaghan*—sometimes there were more than one. As with the Tibetans, we have little data about what duties, relative authority, and place in the line of succession to the ruling *qaghan* these figures had. Michael Drompp informs us of the sometimes nearly chaotic results of this practice in his "Supernumerary sovereigns: superfluity and mutability in the elite power structure of the early Türks (Tu-jue)", in *Rulers from the Steppe* (Los Angeles: Ethnographics Press, 1991), pp. 92–115.

[41] *lha bdag* is otherwise unknown in OT documents. However, there are later occurrences in which it is interpreted in a way that could make sense of its use here. P. Dollfus informs us that a *lha bdag pa* in Ladakh is one who officiates the cult of local deities ("No sacred mountains in Ladakh?", p. 10). Here, there is a connection between that practitioner and a cult of "local deities" (*yul lha*) which some have seen in the *sku bla* (see n. 46). In Bon-po texts studied by S. Karmay ("Les dieux des terroirs et les genévriers: un rituel tibétain de purification".JA.283.1995, esp. pp. 189 and 198, translation and text), the *lha bdag* would certainly seem to have been human intermediaries, and the translator renders the term so.

Unfortunately, there is no diachronic data to connect these concepts closely, and what might seem a logical nexus between *lha*, mountain and *sku bla* might equally be a case of wishful thinking or reinterpretation by later generations of Tibetans. Moreover, although Dollfus says that *lha bdag pa* is found in "ancient Tibetan inscriptions" (p. 10n), I have not found the phrase in them, although *lha bdag* occurs once.

[42] See AFL.121 (text), 130 (translation), where the phrase *sku bla ni gnyan gi drin*, "A kindness of the *sku bla*, the fierce [ones]", may be a key to understanding this concept. The juxtaposition of *gnyan* and *drin* gives this phrase emphasis and color, and the idea of such power balanced with kindness is to impress one with the majesty of the Sku Bla in a very real way. More importantly, it emphasizes that *gnyan* is inherently a positive idea. If we combine a passage in IO751 (see n. 46 for quote) with the prognostications in PT1047 and the above quote, we note that *btsan* in the title *lha btsan po* and *gnyan* are not that different in significance.

Many have puzzled over the meaning of *gnyan* when connected with the Sku Bla (ex., S. Karmay, "The Tibetan cult of mountain deities and its political significance", p. 61). It is used both as a verbal noun, "the Sku Bla being fierce", as well as an adjective (*gnyan po*). (It is still used today in, e.g., *bsang* texts dealing with mountain peaks; this is a continuation of an ancient phraseology, *rï gnyan po*, found in PT986/The Shang shu paraphase. It seems that more than one imposing presence bore this descriptor. Therefore, we need to be cautious in attaching too much significance to what might simply have been a respectful adjective.)

I propose here that the Sku Bla have two different responses to the situations around them and their auguries. When they are being *gnyan*, they are also being supportive of

the Btsan-po and of the Imperium (clear in the IO751 quote and the Rkong-po inscription); when they are not, it may be bad news for the leader as well as the populace as a whole. Several passages in PT1047 foresee the probability of the imminent demise of the *rgyal-pho* if a Sku Bla is dissatisfied, and one of the auguries even mentions a Sku Bla dispatching spirits of famine and disease. Since the Sku Bla are not described as being *gnyan* (*po*) in these cases, we might conclude that the Sku Bla Gnyan-po are by nature positive and helpful, supportive of the power of the Imperium—again, the similarity between the meaning of *btsan* and *gnyan*—but they have a destructive side as well. (For what it is worth, in *bsang* texts from all times, the spirit being propitiated is frequently described as *gnyan/gnyan po*. In the context of this rite it also is a positive quality of the spiritual being from whom the human community is seeking protection, a good harvest, etc.)

[43] It is often used for the actual birth of the children of Btsan-pos and other nobles (frequent in PT1285 and PT1289; see also the entry *bshos pa* in BRDA DKROL.956). Again, despite their exalted and special status, there is no evidence that any btsan-po was considered in OT documents to have been a purely mythical being (although Western scholarship, of course, considers several so), nor were their births considered "unreal".

[44] This Rkong Kar-po may have been the one mentioned at DTH.84, which has a further reference to a mention in chapter fourteen of the *Lha 'dre bka' thang*.

It is not out of place here to consider one point in the sophisticated political discourse of the Rkong-po inscription, especially since some have assumed that the motif involving Dri Gum is central to the ancient mythology of the Imperium. It is clear from the narrative that the leadership of Rkong-po was unhappy with its tax situation within the Imperium in view of previous loyal service rendered. However, this issue has nothing *per se* to do with the asserted common origins of the two leaderships. Since Dri Gum Btsan-po and his descendants are not mentioned in any other inscription or Imperial-period document, and the narrative is here introduced *not* by Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, but by the Rkong Kar-po, we are entitled to speculate that this genealogy was actually a creation of the latter's court, which then became an accession by Khri Srong Lde Brtsan in writing to mollify an important ally and enhance the family origin and status of the Rkong Kar-po. This is one way to explain the role that the otherwise obscure figures of Dri Gum, Sha Khyi, and Nya Khyi play here, as well as in the opening of the *Chronicle*, which simply expands on the story in the inscription. In the *Chronicle* story as well, these figures are connected with Rkong-po. Who, thus, benefits from this narrative? The house of the Rkong Kar-pos, not that of the btsan-pos.

(Because of such considerations, as well as the format of the inscription itself and some wordings in it, we may question whether the Rkong-po inscription was actually produced by the court and dates from the Imperial period. However, we set this question aside in the present work.)

[45] The greatest number of occurrences of *sku bla* in any Old Tibetan text—fourteen times in the first one hundred eight lines—is in PT1047, a genuinely old Old Tibetan text, perhaps from late in the Imperial Period. Nearly every reading of a dice-casting or other divination method in its opening section is aimed at its implication for the *rgyal-pho* or the *btshan-po*. (Interestingly, the former term occurs much more often; this may indicate that the document was originally a translation or from a foreign tradition. Realizing that the auguries in it were meant to be generic, a term less obvious for the leadership of the Imperium was substituted. Evidence for this is the large number of foreign terms in the document, especially concerning the materials and signs of divination; see comments at "Une lecture…", p. 286.) It was designed for court use ("Une lecture…", p. 272), and the differences between this text and the *mo*-text in AFL can be attributed to differences in origin, age, or audience. See the comments on this text by Takeuchi Tsuguhito in the above "A prologue on 'Old Tibetan' documents".

Several mentions of the *sku bla* there have been the subject of "Une lecture…"; cf. p. 276ff especially. In one passage (l. 22–23) the Sku Bla are either spiritual beings, or

have power over them: *yong ni sku bla chen pho myi dgyes phas / ya bdud dang btsan dri dang ma yams dang srï las stsogs pha drangs pha'ï ngo ste rgyal pho dang zhang lon gyi srog phyar ngand rag*, "All [the previous signs indicate that], because the great *sku bla* are dissatisfied, they will in all probability send the *bdud* above, *btsan dri*, and plague and *sri* spirits below. This is perceived to be bad for the life prognostics for the Rgyal-pho and Zhang Lon." In other words, the actions of the Sku Bla are not always supportive of the leadership (cf. comments on *sku bla gnyan po* in n. 42 above), and their power is even superior to them. Lines 27–28 state in a general way that the *sku bla* have propriety over the life and health of the Rgyal-pho (*rgyal pho lo chïg gï bar du cang myi nongs pha'ï ngo / nad pha la btab na sku blas bca' ste lo chig du myi gum pa'i ngo*). However, none of the passages in PT1047 indicates that they were themselves spiritual beings, only that they command or reflect them, which helps explain the awe in which they were held. Other passages in PT1047 indicate in more general ways the conditions under which the Sku Bla either abandon (*'phang*) the leaders or support them. In several passages, it is clear that their support is decisive. In still other passages (lines 102–105) they are discussed in ways that emphasize their arbitrariness. (This, as we have noted, is a characteristic of the spiritual beings behind every important Tibetan social and political grouping, and even applied to the *lha* of the btsan-pos.)

Two passages in PT1047 give us the clearest description we have of the function of the *sku bla gsol ba*. Lines 68–72 also reveal ambiguity about the nature of the Sku Bla, in what looks at its opening to be the interpretation of a vision or a dream involving a young woman by the rgyal-pho: *ling rgyags bab na' / rgyal pho zha sngar bud myed snar mo dung gdub chan bkra' shis ma gcig pyag 'tsald pha'ï // sku bla khyim sa cu ngu nas bud myed bkra shis mas tso tso gsold te zhal gzhend pha'i 'ang ngo / lha g.yang lon zhïng lha myi 'phang ba'ï 'ang ngo*. "If a piece of silk has fallen [on a table]: With regard to a pale young woman wearing a shell ring and propitious (in appearance), paying obeisence before a rgyal-pho: If (such) a propitious-looking young woman from a small family and place offers a *tso tso* to a Sku Bla, that offering will likely be accepted. Receiving [care] of the *g.yang* of the *lha* (of the Rgyal-pho) means it is likely that the Sku Bla will not forsake the *lha* (of the Rgyal-pho)." (There is a partial rendering at "Une lecture…", p. 305.) The Sku Bla abandoning or not abandoning the rgyal-pho is an important concluding point in many of these prognostications. In addition, offering of a *gtor* (*ma*) of melted butter to a Sku Bla is described at lines 82–83.

This brief passage is the only evidence we have of the mechanism whereby the ruler and the *sku bla* interacted. This "young girl" is either a vision before the rgyal-pho or someone chosen from a small village to come before him. This girl then makes an offering to the Sku Bla, and according to this prognostication the latter will probably accept the *tso tso*. This, in turn, sustains the ancestral spirit (*lha*) of the rgyal-pho and, by extension, the current rgyal-pho.

That this passage may refer to divining a dream by, or relating to, the rgyal-pho is supported by a fragment of a dream divination text mentioning the Sku Bla at OTMET. doc242. Clearly, their presence was an essential means by which the court obtained information from auguries seen to affect the fate of the leadership.

These passages, taken together, are a powerful argument for considering that the Sku Bla were a group of human beings who had an intimate relationship with spiritual beings. There is no mention in an Old Tibetan document that there was a group of priests or mediums who acted on behalf of the Sku Bla. This would lead one to the conclusion that the term "Sku Bla", just as *lha*, most likely referred both to human beings and the spiritual beings who supported them.

[46] Mention was made in Chapter One (n. 2) of the Tibetan adaptation of some Chinese political and literary documents. A set of important Tibetan terms is used in several places in these, sometimes in a set phrase. They are clearly meant to communicate what Tibetans wanted others to see as the basis of their polity. Two categories of Chinese concepts are equated with *sku bla* in PT996: *shen* (神), *guei shen* (鬼神),

and *shen ming* (神明), on the one hand, and *tian di* (天地) and *shen di* (神地) on the other. All occurrences of the first three are rendered by Coblin, with some doubt, as "tutelary spirits" (see W. South Coblin, "A study of the Old Tibetan *Shangshu* paraphrase", JAOS.111.303–322 and 523–539; cf. esp. 523). We have several categories of entities equated here: *shen*, which may mean "spirits" or even "gods" in general, as well as an array of related meanings, is the most prominent term, and also occurs in the last compound, "spirits of the earth/soil".

Most of these do not have precise applications; they are categorical terms, in that each can cover a plurality of spiritual beings. They leave us rather in the dark about what Sku Bla was supposed to correspond to in the Chinese world. It may also be relevant that *shen* was an element in the titles of emperors in Han and Tang times; this at least shows that the terms intersected with the transcendent nature of rule.

Only with *shen ming* do we find a similarity in function with one of the few known characteristics of the Sku Bla, and once again we find a connection with Buddhist concepts. In an apocryphal Daoist-Buddhist text from about this time, with fragments left at Dunhuang, the *Ching lu yi xiang* (經律異相), the *shen ming* were spiritual beings who examined human conduct according to the Chinese concepts of the *liu zou* (六奏) and the *si fu* (四覆) for purposes of deciding final judgment. (The *shen ming* occur in Daoist materials with a variety of meanings. On the special use of the term in the *Ching lu yi xiang*, see Kuo Li-ying, *Confession et contrition dans le bouddhism chinois du V^e^ et VI^e^ siécle*, p. 96. For the Confucian categories in this document and their incorporation into Buddhism, see, *e.g.*, Charles Orzech, *Politics and transcendent wisdom: the Scripture for humane kings in the creation of Chinese Buddhism*. For yet another use of *shen ming* in Chinese Buddhist translations, see Whalen Lai, "Emperor Wu of Liang on the immortal soul, *shen pu mieh*", JAOS.101.1981.167–175; cf. p. 169 *á propos* Aśvaghoṣa.)

In PT1047, the old divination text discussed and quoted in the preceding note, the Sku Bla had authority regarding the relationship between the *rgyal pho* (not btsan-po, on the significance of which see the discussion in Chapter Four) and his *lha*, thus affecting the health and welfare of the ruler. They also interpreted omens—the character of the girl making the offering in the example quoted here. Their power as intermediaries in deciding the fate of the ruler is clear. There is thus a general, functional similarity between the *shen ming* and the Sku Bla. (We note, again, that nothing to do with mountains is expressed in the concept of *shen ming*.)

Another important term in the set, found with Sku Bla, is *gtsug lag*. Sometimes it was not given an equivalent in these translations; at least once it stands for *xien wang* (先王), "customs of the ancient rulers". Neither is a match which covers all its occurrences in Old Tibetan materials. (We will discuss *gtsug lag* in Chapter Four.) Finally, the terms *btsan po* and *rgyal po* are not found; could this have been due to a desire not to ruffle Chinese court feathers by introducing figures who could be seen to rival the Emperor? The fact that Sku Bla *is* included at least emphasizes that it was an important concept, from the Tibetan point of view, and perhaps especially to those who actually composed these adaptations. The Sku Bla were somehow important, even definitive, concerning the special power underlying the Imperium.

[47] Before we discuss particulars here, a word is needed about the concept of the "mountain cult" in Tibet, as well as throughout Asia. Actually, there isn't one. There are many. And, despite the fact that some good anthropological research has been done recently, none has been defined diachronically and in detail, because there are so many peculiarities among them (typological, terminological, and mythological) that harmonizing a consistent definition for the concept is well-nigh impossible. (Compare the relative unity of material on Chingis Qan and Mt. Burqan Qaldun with the Tibetan data.) We also note that all references to a mountain cult in Tibet eventually rest on modern or much later data which is presumed to be valid for earlier times.

As are so many other things having to do with Tibetan religion, it is perhaps the stubbornness of local traditions that precludes us from deducing universals which would

provide a basis for describing a generalizable "mountain cult". A diachronic investigation is especially necessary when some claim that such a cult existed in, and has not changed since, Imperial times. All things considered, it would be nice if scholars could, from now on, actually put forward even a provisional definition of what they mean when they talk about a "mountain cult", especially in ancient times. Such a description should include elements found to be (at least nearly) universal in Tibetan cultures, as well as local, and be at least somewhat generalizable through time. To judge from the articles in *Reflections of the mountain*, *Tibetan mountain deities*, and other research works that will be difficult to achieve.

Now, with regard to the Sku Bla in particular, we start with citations of the term in R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and demons of Tibet*, and the name of the mountain—including its title—Sku Bla Mkha' Ri, in Bhutan (S. Karmay, "Dorje Lingpa and his rediscovery of the "Gold needle" in Bhutan".*Journal of Bhutan studies* (Online), 36 p. No significance for the use of this term is given in either work. Such evidence is in any event problematic for two reasons, if we try to project it into Imperial times, which is so often done: There is no evidence that the Sku Bla had a relationship with mountains at this time. (A fact noted by S. Karmay in his "The Tibetan cult of mountain deities and its political significance", p. 61, *contra* the assertion in "Une lecture…", p. 304. References to the article of S. Karmay in this note are to this work.). One of the problems with A. MacDonald's assertion is that there were *several* Sku Bla in the 'A-zha territory, not just one, which leaves unexplained how many "sacred mountains" one area needs, or how they came to be established outside of Tibet; she also asserts that the *sku bla gsol ba* was carried out at the 'A-zha court; this is actually not stated in the texts. In addition, several categories of beings—*btsan, lha*, etc.—are associated with mountains in Phyi Dar traditions, leaving the meaning of such an association very vague without supporting documentation. More on this, again, in Chapter Four.

MacDonald tries to connect these beliefs with the Imperium in her work, mostly using later materials, as Karmay also does. To cite just one problem with this reconstruction of a "mountain cult" of the btsan-pos surrounding 'O Lde Spu Rgyal, Yar Lha Sham-po, or other figures and mountains, the btsan-pos were not born on or near that mountain; nor is there any evidence they worshipped mountains as their birthplaces, or in any other way. The overwhelming evidence in truly Old Tibetan sources, such as the inscriptions, is that the btsan-pos came from a "heavenly" realm to be the lords of human beings; mountains served in this royal ideology only as an intermediary point wherein they transited to the human realm. They easily could have held these mountains to be sacred places, or could have included the special status of mountains in their own cult, but we have no knowledge about this. Also, if, as I believe, the office of the btsan-po was an intrusive feature, there may have been no value in associating it with some (hypothetical) ancient "mountain cult" from before their time. As a final observation, we lack any passages in, e.g., the inscriptions or the *Chronicle* about this, and these works, more than any others, explain the political basis of the power of the btsan-po in its relation to the function of the Tibetan government. In IO751.35v2, inserted after an extensive *phyag tshal* to the Triratna, we find the phrase *'O Lde Spu Rgyal gnam gyï lha las myï'ï rjer gshegs pa yong gïs sku bla gnyan / chab srid che / chos bzang / gtsug lag che bas yul byung sa ngod tshun cad rje'ï gdung ma gyurd te / chab srid g.yung drub* [*drung*] *du brtan zhïng che ba'ï bka' drin chen pos phyogs brgyad du khyab par khebste*, i.e., "All those who have come to be the lords of men from their ancestral spiritual being in heaven, 'O Lde Spu Rgyal, because their Sku Bla are fierce (see n. 42), their dominions great, their religious customs (*chos*) good, and their *gtsug lag* great, the lineage of these lords is not changing as far as the face of the earth (extends) and all lands there, so that their dominion is firm forever; and they spread it, through their compassion which is great, to pervade the eight directions." This passage makes it clear that whatever "cult" accompanied 'O Lde Spu Rgyal related first to his being an ancestor in heaven, whose name was later applied to a certain mountain.

Otherwise, no mention of mountains is found in such formulae, nor are mountains referred to as sources of power. Finally, we have the interesting example of Gnam Ri Slon Mtshan (the latter element misinterpreted later as Btsan). If ever the existence of a "mountain cult" could be exposed in the use of a title, you would think this would be it. However, even the CHRONICLE (at DTH.106) treats his title as a set of metaphors. No connection to an actual mountain is even contemplated there. (Also at the beginning of the *Chronicle*, there is the narrative of Dri Gum and his fight with Lo Ngam. The former is about to be drawn back to his heavenly home, *gnam*, by the spiritual being Lde Bla Gung Rgyal, when Lo Ngam offends the latter. Lde Bla Gung Rgyal ascends into the clouds *around* Kailas, abandoning Dri Gum, who is killed. Certainly, here is an ideal place in a narration to provide a significant role for a mountain, but as far as we know, Ti-se/Kailas is only named because of its general prominence. It is not otherwise connected in beliefs with the btsan-pos. See this passage and its translation at DTH.98;124.)

S. Karmay presents a functional definition of Sku Bla similar to the one I have given here. However, he continues the tradition of rendering *bla* as "soul", despite the fact that its usage in Old Tibetan documents was primarily—if not exclusively—political. This in part is what causes his errant interpretation of the term on p. 66 of his article. Passages in the Rkong-po inscription and PT1047 make it clear that, whatever else the Sku Bla may have been, they are not "the souls of the body" of the Btsan-po. He also freely mixes data from Imperial and post-Imperial times, assuming an unproved continuity. The text he adduces on pp. 61ff, from the document at AFL, Ch. IV, p. 52ff, is not an *old* Old Tibetan text, not nearly as old as PT1047. The key to understanding the text in AFL is to analyze the plethora of obscure names and references it contains, and which has lent it an exotic air. The document itself does not even relate to the Imperium, but to the Skyi Kingdom, which is also rather confusing, since it contains a core of Tibetan religio-political vocabulary. Thomas even thought this document must have been translated into Tibetan from another language (AFL.61). While it is not necessary for us to accept that here, their use *could* be a matter of "matching concepts" by a post-Imperial author from that region with a narrow agenda, similar to what we saw with the Tibetan political terms in the translations of Chinese texts. In any event, what they have to say about the Imperium is unclear due to the motives and knowledge of its composer(s), as well as the age of the document.

The principal reason Karmay cites this work is that he considers it to be an old Dunhuang text which geographically places a series of Sku Bla and describes their relationship to local Tibetan leadership. Nevertheless, none of the Sku Bla located in particular places mentioned in OT materials are mentioned in this text. Further, as we have said, this text is not concerned with events in the Imperium, and no attempt is made in this article to show why we should consider that it bears any relation to it. In fact, it is another mythological/divination text prescribing relationships (*glud*) between human beings and spiritual beings. It certainly has a political dimension, as does PT1047—which makes the latter worth studying for that reason—but it is neither old enough nor well-enough understood at this point to be asserted as having information about the Sku Bla in the Imperium. The song about the Sku Bla at ALF.62 (this is the only text I've seen in which the term is consistently misspelled) also does not inform us about their function, or refer to their place in any "mountain cult".

Like many others, S. Karmay believes the Bon tradition preserves the memory of religious beliefs underlying the power of the Imperium. This belief justifies trying to create a harmonious whole of data showing various beliefs from different periods of time. Unfortunately, when all is said and done, all Bon texts are post-Imperial—a subject discussed briefly in the next chapter. Also, just as Rnying-ma and other Buddhist traditions treat Imperial-period subjects by placing them in their own religious environment (of course), so also Bon texts show a tremendous development of ideas—usually local, and with obvious Buddhist influences in numerical symbolism, orientation,

etc.—sometimes involving terminology found in older sources. One clear example is his citation of the names of some "mountain deities" on p. 62 of his article. Most of these names occur in both PT1285 and the ALF document, and in later Bon materials. There is agreement about some of these, and this may show continuity—at least some memory—from Imperial times. However, to give them a religious context that goes back to the Imperium, he equates them with a Bon set, the *lha dgu*, and says that the ALF document (at p. 62?) equates them with Sku Bla, which term is not found there. (Also against this is the extended first Bsam-yas edict at DPA'-BO.1985.371 where *Bod yul gyi sku lha* and *lha dgu thams cad* are listed as different categories of spiritual beings.) Aside from being unable to support this assertion, *lha dgu* is a doubly ambiguous term: Not only can it simply be the plural of *lha*, as *dgu* is a plural marker (well stated at ALF.62), there is also more than one group of *lha dgu*; another is attested in the Byang Gter Phur-pa cycle. As in so many other interpretations of Imperial-period beliefs in modern Tibetan scholarship, the will to believe is not a trustworthy guide.

48 For example, if we compare the definitions for *sku bla* in two standard lexicons with the data from OT sources, we become confused. This sparse, inconsistent data only affirms that, in the chaotic period between the fall of the Imperium and the Phyi Dar, a great amount of ritual and mythological knowledge was lost because it was awkward, or not profitable, for the nascent Buddhist and Bon traditions to fit them into their agendas.

First, to the citations: in BRDA DKROL and the *Bod Rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* the first definition cited for Sku Bla is *skyes pa'i lha*. Because BRDA DKROL only cites one Old Tibetan and two later passages in which the term occurs to support its definition, it is a definition from context, thus a tautological assertion for its meaning. Nevertheless, this is also the consensus definition of Tibetan scholars dealing with the Dunhuang documents, as we see in this meaning for Sku Bla cited at BOD KYI.82: *skyes lha ste / mi so so skye sa 'i yul gyi lha dang lha mo*. A definition for *skye*[*s*] *lha* actually explained by example seems only to be obtained from much later material, as in the *Gung Thang gdung rabs*, edited in the eighteenth century by Tshe Dbang Nor-bu and adduced by Ariane MacDonald to help explicate *sku bla* in Old Tibetan materials from nearly one thousand years before ("Une lecture…", p. 300). Here, the author is clearly worshipping a mountain as the (seat of the?) ancestral spiritual being (*lha*) of the land of his birth. This resembles the motif of 'the spirit within the mountain as *gzhi bdag*', which is well attested in modern anthropological research, but which, again, can only be projected into, not attested from, Imperial times.

In conclusion, there is no way to connect the nature of the Sku Bla in Old Tibetan materials with its later dictionary meaning, which seems to have been based on the concept of "the god of the land of one's birth". Likewise, we cannot extrapolate a definition for the Sku Bla in Old Tibetan materials because we lack sufficient context for that. Ariane MacDonald reflects this confusion in making the abrupt transition of Sku Bla from *gzhi bdag* to *'khrungs lha* at "Une lecture…", p. 306, without creating a logical framework for how this might be accomplished. This is a case—not the only one—where we can clearly see a rupture in the tradition, with understandable later interpretations and redefinitions.

Let us assume, however—since at this point it is difficult to completely include or exclude all the ideas that have floated around the Sku Bla—that somehow they could be considered *skyes lha*. This would work if we had any indication in Old Tibetan materials that they were connected with the family of the btsan-pos or other nobility, even if all reference to a "mountain cult" were lacking, as it is. Unfortunately, we have no indication—and the auguries we find in PT1047 support this—that the Sku Bla were necessarily working for the benefit of the btsan-po, or were even closely connected to the ruler. They seem to have represented, in many ways, independent beings with their own power base.

Finally, we should say a word about *sku bla* and *sku lha*. Are these allographs, truly ambiguous concepts with a matching ambiguity in spelling, or two separate groups of

spiritual beings? I think A. MacDonald confuses the situation on p. 300, following some good observations about Sku Bla, when she simply accepts their identity. In fact, *sku lha* does not occur in the inscriptions, or apparently any genuine Old Tibetan documents; it is never found in a context where it shows that it is being confused with Sku Bla; and finally, it does not make sense as a political term, since we have no reason to believe that the *sku* of the btsan-po has a *lha*—the latter concept applies to the lineage of the btsan-pos themselves. (Memory of this familial relationship is preserved in the *Byang gter cho ga spyi 'gro'i lhan thabs Nor bu'i phra tshom*. Dharamsala: Bod Gzhung Shes-rig Par-khang, p. 119ff) This is aside from the fact that the Sku Bla were not *lha*, if this latter concept is to have any meaning at all. (The only qualifier we have for the Sku Bla is, again, *gnyan po*.)

From the point of view of language, it makes no sense to use *sku* as a prefix to create an honorific form of *lha*, which we otherwise would see throughout Old Tibetan literature, at least occasionally. The term *sku lha* also does not occur in any standard Tibetan lexicon, unlike Sku Bla. The phrase only occurs three times, twice in texts which would seem old (perhaps reflecting an innovation from the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan), but which may equally be the result of a redactor's hand. To wit, it occurs twice in Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag, once in the extended version of the Bsam-yas inscription (1985.371), and again at DPA'-BO.1985.416 (*dkon cog gsum lha klu gza' skar sku lha thams cad dpang du btsugs te btsan po dbon zhang gis dbu snyung mdzad*). It also occurs in an interesting context at SBA BZHED.2000.98 (text folio 47v): *brten pa'i sku lha ni Yar Lha Sham-po /... Yar Lha Sham-po ni gnyan zhing mthu che*, which appears to connect both with a "mountain cult" and with the Sku Bla, since they share the qualifier *gnyan*. However, the *Sba bzhed* traditions were composed well after the Imperium, and their agenda is to inform us about Buddhist traditions at the court of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, not about other ancient customs of the btsan-pos, about which we have no basis to believe that the compilers of its various texts cared to preserve detailed knowledge. Again, if Yar Lha Sham-po were important to the btsan-pos, one would find some reference to it in ancient texts. Instead, it is of no importance in Imperial-period documents, and its significance today is more likely due to a later tradition which sees it as the location of the continuing presence of 'O Lde Spu Rgyal near the seat of the Btsan-pos.

We also should consider whether Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag was dealing with a text that had undergone some changes before he copied it. The alternative is that, as with Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang Nor-bu's transcriptions of several inscriptions, Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag was not rigorous in dealing with Old Tibetan orthography. In any event, comparing the transcription of the Bsam-yas inscription in RICHARDSON.H.1985 or LI & COBLIN with that in DPA'-BO.1985.376 reveals numerous changes to modern forms. We thus have several reasons for questioning whether the *sku lha* in Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag's transcriptions was the original spelling. It could have been Sku Bla. Therefore, we have no unquestionable citation of *sku lha* in verifiably Old Tibetan documents, and it is another "non-Buddhist" concept that, strangely, only occurs in Buddhist documents or those composed by Buddhists. Yet another argument against equating these terms is that the office of Sku Bla was still active during the reign of Ral-pa-can, as shown by two citations of the phrase *sku bla ring rdzi* in documents referring to him, the "De-ga smon lam" (TLTD.II.93/IO751.35v2 and PT016). During his later reign, then, *sku lha* had not been substituted for Sku Bla. This is also an argument against the accuracy of the reading *sku lha gsol ba* cited in the passage from Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag in Chapter One, n. 84, which should certainly have been *sku bla gsol ba*, as we find in the TLTD and OTM secular documents and fragments.

It should be noted that we have one other example, in later literature, of a confusion of *lha* and *bla*. That is in the concept *dgra lha/dgra bla*. This alternation is pervasive and unexplainable. However, I do not believe that it has any application to the above example; I include it only as supplementary information.

[49] "It is interesting to note that a specific term that would mean 'mountain deity' exists neither in Bhutan, nor, to my knowledge, in the rest of the Tibetan world"—F. Pommaret, "On local and mountain deities in Bhutan", *Reflections of the mountain*, p. 42. Neither is such a term found in Old Tibetan documents. There is also no known individual or group responsible for worship of them mentioned in Old Tibetan documents, or later; certainly, the Sku Bla cannot be shown to be so. Since we have so many rituals, *bsangs* and others, in Bon and Rnying-ma literature of the Phyi Dar, it has seemed easy to assume that their traditions refer to, or come from, Imperial times. Even in these documents, though, overt, verifiable references connecting them with that period are absent, and the use of authentically ancient religio-political terminology in them is very rare, as rare as in other sorts of materials.

[50] In n. 37, we noted that *bla*, in most of its occurrences in OT political and historical documents and letters, means "government". This is an extension of its central meanings, "high", "elevated", "superior", which are still found today. The connection with *govern*-ment—especially, but not only, the astrological dimension of being a *pati*—is present at MV.3692. At MV.3704 we have the political *narapati = rgyal po*, *mi'i bla* and *mi bdag*. These equivalences show that, in the late Imperial/early Phyi Dar period, the transition to a Buddhist technical term had been accomplished. It continued the concept of lordship even as it was internalized, which set the stage for its use in the *Kālacakra* system, soon to be introduced, as a concept usually mistranslated in the West as "soul". Based on its occurrences in authentically old Old Tibetan documents, its original meaning was clearly that of *governing power*, though in ways we do not clearly understand today; even though Tibetans and Westerners have become habituated to rendering it as "soul", the essence of the concept lies in that direction.

I pass without comment here on the suggestion in R. Emmerick and O.P. Skjaervo, *Studies in the vocabulary of Khotanese*, that *bla* may be a borrowing of Khotanese *perai*, "supervenient". Appropriate as their meanings are, their phonetic non-correspondence rules out such a borrowing. Indeed, from the view of historical linguistics, both *bla* and *lha* are clearly Tibeto-Burman, part of the early shared vocabulary of that language family. The closest related forms have to do with "moon"/"month" (Old Tibetan *sla*/ classical written Tibetan *zla*, e.g.) and Burmese-Lolo *sla* with Tibetan *lha* "god", "soul". (Benedict, *Sino-Tibetan: a conspectus*, p. 42 and 132.) One of the observations we may make about such examples (and these are the only clear ones) concerns their *semantic* breadth. The more "umbrella" definitions one finds in a study, the less certain have been the results of research into the ancient connections between sets of terms. The closer the definitions of morphologically similar forms, attested or well reconstructed, the more certain that this meaning is somehow "original", and has historical validity. To judge from the above, we may be dealing with an original equation of the moon with a spiritual being or soul, meaning that these ideas convey the concept of something circular (but perhaps changeable in shape) and shining. More than this we cannot say.

Again, as a religionist, an observation is in order. Those who compiled the word lists used by anthropological and historical linguists in the area of Tibetan and Burmese language studies have, it seems, avoided including religious terminology whenever possible, as well as vocabulary items for sophisticated political concepts. (We know they must have deliberately avoided these because of the richness of religious vocabulary in modern Tibetan, Burmese, and Karen which can be found in recent anthropological research and in texts in these languages.) As a result, we have an extremely restricted and arbitrary vocabulary which works to the detriment of the social and religious studies of these peoples. It also hampers the linguistic comparison of those vocabularies. This would help explain why there is not yet a single article on "Tibeto-Burman religion" or on concepts connected with the topic.

[51] In his "Lamaism and the disappearance of Tibet" (*Constructing Tibetan culture*. Quebec: World Heritage Press, 1999, pp. 19–46; cf. especially p. 20f and note 3), Donald Lopez attempts to clear up some of the misleading concepts surrounding *bla*

and *bla ma* that have developed over time. Unfortunately, as many other interpreters, he failed to notice that in Old Tibetan documents it never means "soul" or the like. It is, first, foremost, and originally, a political term. S. Karmay's views cited in the note of that article are made, again, without recourse to truly old sources, and are another example of vague assertions about past religious truths that are based on what people assume *had* to be, rather than on what the sources give us.

[52] In early Buddhist materials about Spyan-ras-gzigs we encounter for the first time the series *'og*, *bla*, and *steng*. This serves to further convey that *bla* is to be considered something directly over us, an immediate presence. Also, an untitled work in the Sde Dge Bstan 'Gyur (Delhi, 1985, Rgyud 'Grel, v. 72, p. 256) refers to Avalokiteśvara as purifying these realms: *sa bla dang ni sa stengs sa 'og dud 'gro la sogs*. For more on the politics of Avalokiteśvara, see Chapter Four.

[53] An early example of the corporate *bla* may be in the expression Ya Bla Bdag Drug, a set of probably ancestral spiritual beings mentioned in the Rkong-po inscription. To judge from the name, they were *lha*, perhaps past btsan-pos acted as a "heavenly government" which either guided or provided a model for living btsan-pos. We are ignorant as to what mechanism, if any, connected them in religion or ritual to their living descendents. For a discussion of the spelling variants of this phrase, see BRDA DKROL.832.

[54] If those around the Btsan-po formed sets of traditional *comitati*, all had to be rewarded. This was a trade-off the leader made for dependable support and security. This means that, although the Imperium was contained within the corporate *sku*, which represented the greatness of the btsan-po, the practical basis for its conception was to serve as a resource which could be given by him as largess. Similar conceptions are found through ancient and medieval Central Eurasia. For example, at the Mongol courts there were potlatch-type dispensations to reward and continue the oath relationship between the ruler and the nobility, as described in detail by Marco Polo.

[55] Mention was made above that *bla* continued to be used in a political sense long into the Phyi Dar. In the *Gung Thang gdung rabs* of Kaḥ-thog Tshe-dbang Nor-bu (1698–1755) we encounter phrases that could be out of an Old Tibetan document: *Dkon mchog rnam gsum blar mchod dge ba'i las*..., *Dkon mchog gsum bla mar mchod*..., *Dkon mchog gsum bla mar bkur*..., and *Dkon mchog gsum bla mar byed pa che bsngags*... In these examples *blar* and *bla mar* are, again, interchangeable.

Although we are extrapolating from a small data base, we note one obvious point, to which we return in Chapter Four. From its very inception (e.g., materials making up the *Bka'- gdams glegs bam*), the Bka'-gdams-pa tradition has used the phrase *bla ma* very much as it does today. On the other hand, early Rnying-ma-pa practitioners were trained and valued as *sngags pa*, local practitioners of rituals based on the model of Padmasambhava. Their preferred early term for teacher was *guru*, beginning with Padmasambhava, but it also was significantly the title of Chos-kyi Dbang-phyug (1212–1270), an important early *gter ston*. That Kaḥ-thog Tshe-dbang Nor-bu continued to use the term *bla ma* in its older meaning in the eighteenth century shows that an old tradition was being kept alive. Perhaps it was useful to counterbalance forces which were embracing the categorizations of the Gsar-ma schools. Only with the widespread reconfiguration of Rnying-ma monasticism to follow the Dge-lugs-pa model—which had begun before Kaḥ-thog's time—did *bla ma* become a term widely used among them. Of course, by using the term as he did, Kaḥ-thog also shows us he understood its oldest *political* meaning.

[56] E.g., in SBA BZHED.1982.20, where a virtuous *ācārya* is described as one who *lhar Dkon mchog gsum mchod*, "honors the Triratna [to be] *lha*". It is obvious that this doesn't refer to the Indic *lha*, who could never be equated in value with a Buddhist symbol. Rather, the comparison is being made with something of much greater value, the ancestral spiritual beings of the nobility, and in particular those of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan.

The 'Dul-ba provides many examples of such transitional thinking, to judge by the following example, since it often deals with quite practical situations of correct Buddhist practice. Note this excerpt from the *Uttaragrantha*: *gang gis lha rnams mchod byed pa Ston-pa'i bka' bzhin byed pa ste Sangs Rgyas kyis kyang de la bsngags*. The commentary below specifies where these *lha* are to be encountered, thus providing us with some of the earliest information we have on that subject. (This material is presented by Gregory Schopen in "On Buddhist monks and dreadful deities: some monastic devices for updating the Dharma", p. 163.)

[57] Lucian, in the second century, composed "Tokharis, or friendship", a dialogue between a Scythian and a Greek. It served several purposes, including the presentation of idealized concepts of friendship shared between their peoples. However, it opens with words put into the mouth of the Scythian which are meant to explain why *both* peoples worship fallen heroes in addition to gods, and why they do so in the same way, i.e., through sacrifices and feasts: "In honouring the dead we consider that we are also doing the best we can for the living. Our idea is that by preserving the memory of the noblest of mankind, we induce many people to follow their example." (The quote is from *The works of Lucian of Samosata*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1905, vol. 3, p. 36.) This sentiment is especially relevant as a comparison with ancient Tibetan customs because it serves as a rationale for considering *noble behavior* to be a basis both for worship as well as social leadership.

It is good to keep in mind when considering this subject that there has been no comprehensive study of the nature of divinity among the Indo-European peoples. The flexibility of this concept may explain why, contrary to what is sometimes asserted, speculation on the divine nature of the ruler has wandered all over the Indian religio-political map. In addition to diverse views in a number of important Hindu works, consider the famous political passages in the *Suvarṇabhāsasūtra* (see n. 62, below), and add to this the panorama of *deva*s presented in the second *Avalokitasūtra* (MAHĀVASTU.II.294), which speaks of *bhūmyā devā*, of somewhat lowly rank. Compare these with the concept expressed by several scholars that *of course*, with millions of deities, and their ability to transit to earth, a king could logically be considered to be a divine being. The only question is, what sort of being? In n. 74 below we will see how Sanghas intermediated the process whereby leaders became a *lha/deva* as a process of transfiguration.

[58] We assert here that when people use the term "god", the cultural values we attach to this term requires that it refers to beings of cosmic significance and power, perhaps eternal in nature, usually individualized so each may possess certain unique qualities. Gods are also often law or model givers, or have some ethical dimension. All these qualities are lacking in *lha*—as well as any other group of Tibetan spiritual beings—whose presence in a human lineage is limited to conferring the special social status we call "nobility". Their control or influence on nature is limited to areas—often those special to a clan—and when this isn't the case, there is usually a memory of a special relationship with a clan in the past. It was these beings, often associated with mountain fastnesses, who controlled a definable amount of land and resources in Tibet, guided the fates of their living descendents, and provided inspirational leadership (literally, through the btsan-pos and clan leadership) upon which the strength of the Imperium depended. Common people, lacking such direct spiritual protection and guidance, depended on these *lha* as a group and the btsan-po's *lha* in particular during the Imperium. This is clearly stated at the opening of several inscriptions, e.g., as in two opening passages (west and east inscription) of the Zhwa'i Lha Khang inscription, the east already quoted in the body of this chapter: (W) *gnam lhab kyï rgyal po / 'phrul gyi lha btsan po khri lde srong brtsan gyi / bkas* / and (E) *myï'i rgyal po lhas mdzad pa / 'phrul gyi lha btsan po Khri / Lde Srong Brtsan gyi bkas*…(RICHARDSON.H.1985.46;54). These invoke the authority of Sad-na-legs based on his being a fierce one (*btsan po*) and a *lha*, the magical manifestation of his ancestral spiritual beings, one who was made a

ruler over men by his ancestral spiritual beings (*lha*). (I prefer the rendering "made a ruler of men by *lha*" for *lhas mdzad pa* to that in LI & COBLIN.291, "personified by a god".) Anthropologists working in Tibet have found that, minus the centralized political power wielded by noble clans, human collectivities living in the vicinity of a particular mountain still often see themselves as depending on its *lha*.

The above passages, together with the apposed titulature *'phrul gyi lha byang chub chen po* in the 'Phyong Rgyas inscription—see the text at RICHARDSON.H.1985.40—also clearly explain what the vexing phrase *'phrul gyi lha* was all about. This phrase shows that Khri Srong was accorded "by all the people" two titles, the former and *Mahābodhi(sattva), which phrase is apposed to what is perhaps a new way to look at his relationship with his ancestral spiritual beings. Unsatisfactory attempts to explain *'phrul gyi lha* by recourse to Chinese "parallels" and calques notwithstanding (Stein, "Saint et divin…"), every occurrence of this phrase in an Old Tibetan document is best understood on the grammatical basis that *'phrul gyi* is an attributive phrase modifying *lha*. (On *'phrul gyi* cf. the example of *bod kyi* for the attributive "Tibetan".) Ergo, a *'phrul gyi lha* is thus a "changed" or "transformed" *lha*, which is perfectly consistent with our interpretation of btsan po as a *lha* manifest. It also agrees with MV.3082, *nirmāna-ratayaḥ = 'phrul dga'*. The btsan-po is thus accorded status as a manifested *lha* ("magical manifestation", an unnecessary inflation, if one wishes, for *'phrul*, based on its later use as a translation term), as his predecessors had been. These ancestral beings had certainly already been accepted into the system of a Buddhist cosmology, which elevated them into a Bodhisattva lineage. Thus, on line 19 of the 'Phyong Rgyas inscription, Khri Srong Lde Brtsan has himself referred to as a Chos Rgyal Chen-po, 'Great Dharmarāja', setting up the titulature in line 40 given above.

When dealing with *sprul/'phrul*, we need to keep in mind that definitions in Jäschke and the other standard lexicons, upon which most have depended for their interpretation, are extrapolated on the basis of their later Buddhist applications in the vast literature translated and spread in the Phyi Dar. There is no reason to be held by these interpretations when dealing with their occurrences in the inscriptions and other Old Tibetan materials. Unfortunately, the *Mahāvyutpatti* is our earliest lexical source, as cited above, but we should not stray too far from its use of *nirmāṇa* as a match for *'phrul*, especially because we know that it was actually composed under the order of a btsan-po. Thus, its meanings cannot deviate very much from what the court and its Sangha understood such terminology to mean. When we consider that this was the context of its earliest use, *nirmāṇa* as an equivalent of *'phrul* should be understood not to refer to an illusory creation, but to the 'supernatural' manifestation of an ancestral spiritual being through Indic terminology. The reality of the process is not questioned. Rather, it refers to the nature of the btsan-po as a presence.

We do not understand clearly why this phrase came into vogue, but its meaning, from context, is clear. Is it another example of a Buddhist interpretation of the status of a btsan-po? It bears repeating, even though it is apodictic, that all inscriptions were created by "Buddhist" btsan-pos, so deciding whether a term or wording is "Buddhist" or has Buddhist content is a difficult task. Perhaps we actually should assume such, if there is no evidence to the contrary. If the "letter" attributed to Buddhaguhya is genuine, it is a very early transitional document, composed at the origin of the Phyi Dar. Its opening passage helps illustrate how *sku* and *'phrul/sprul* were understood in a Buddhist context late in the ninth century: *Bod-kyi Spu Rgyal mgo nag yongs kyi rje / Khri Srong Lde'u Btsan Ag Tshom mes kyi sras / Rlung Nag 'Phrul-gyi Rgyal-po'i dbon po yi / Srong Btsan Sgam-po Spyan Ras Gzigs kyi sku / byang chub sems dpa'i sku rgyud gdung ma chad /… rigs kyi sprul pa Khri Srong Lde'u Btsan gyis / 'gro ba'i mun pa'i skar khung dbye slad du / Rgya gar yul gyi Rdo Rje Gdan stengs su / Sde Snod Gsum-po Ŝâkya Thub-pas gsungs…* [BUDDHAGUHYA.135.] In other words, both the verbal and nominal forms may have originally been used in the inscriptions to explain how a btsan-po was, at one and the same time, a "manifestation" of a Buddhist spiritual

being (here, Avalokiteśvara) and of ancestral *lha* who were simultaneously members of a Buddha *kula*, a situation we alluded to in Chapter One and which is just another example of the additive principal of titles and powers accorded to rulers. Implicit in the hierarchy of the passage attributed to Buddhaguhya is that the *kula* all manifest from the *sku*, which is in itself a statement of the familial continuation of Srong Btsan Sgam-po = Avalokiteśvara.

See note 74, below, for examples of how Sanghas accomplished this in general in other Buddhist cultures.

Rolf Stein injects an error of interpretation in another direction when he undertakes to correct Ariane MacDonald's interpretation of *'phrul gyi lha* as 'god incarnate' on p. 242 of his "Saint et divin…"—which meaning isn't too far off from what we suggest here, absent the understanding of the ancestral-familial dimension of *lha*. Neither of these authors sought to understand, in most of their analyses, what might have been the Tibetan bases of the polity in the documents they studied. Prompted by Indological and Sinological scholarship and other considerations, key terms were rendered as if the only meanings they might have had were those translators had given them. There is thus a tradition of assuming that Tibetan politico-religious vocabulary means nothing by itself, or is not analyzable, and to grasp the meaning of these terms we must resort to the calques used for them—this, despite long-standing Chinese disinterest in providing precise descriptions of the religious and political institutions of other peoples.

[59] One of the most fascinating qualities of Tibet's religious culture is that every sort of leadership position in society—including *lha*—is paralleled by a category of powerful spiritual being, e.g., the *rgyal po*, *btsan*, *rje*, *jo bo*, *dge bsnyen*, *dge slong*. (A perusal of the index to R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz's *Oracles and demons of Tibet* will reveal even more). We find in this a similarity with groups of Mongolian spiritual beings such as the *ejed* and *qad*. Two points of further similarity: Many groups of these spirits have martial features and are feared and respected because they control geographically-defined areas. *lha*, *ejed*, and *qad* spirits are also frequently the spirits of heroic ancestors who have undergone a process of what we might call "deification", in that they have been accorded supernatural powers. The physical and spiritual terrain of the worlds of Tibetans and Mongols is divided up among them and their living representatives.

This is the strongest evidence for *bivalence* as a basic element in the Tibetan world-view that we have. In both spirit and human categories, leadership and hierarchy run parallel, and apparently always have. This is the basis of the relationship between the *lha* and the btsan-pos as discussed here. It also helps us, again, to bring Tibet into a general alignment with the religious values of the peoples of Central Eurasia and Siberia. Tibetans believed, along with Mongols and others, that the strength of any empire or people depended on the strength of its spiritual beings. Even more than these peoples, the Tibetans had a system in which its leadership was in a dynamic connection with—in fact, was a living reflection of—the world of the spirits. This has obtained from the btsan-pos and *sku bla* all the way to the current generation of incarnate lamas and *sprul sku*s. Perhaps more than any other society, in Tibet the combination in one person of a spiritual being and a human being in a position of leadership is a tradition that goes at least as far back as their recorded history.

[60] Clear evidence in support of *lha* as "ancestral spiritual being" in Tibetan culture is based on anthropological research into modern Tibetan religion. Such research, epitomized in the two recent volumes on "mountain cults" cited here (*Reflections on the mountain* and *Tibetan mountain deities: their cults and representations*), shows that the nature of *lha* has not changed significantly since the days of the Imperium, even though the government and many noble clans that were attached to *lha* have disappeared. These spiritual beings still inhabit regions just above the peaks of mountains, have power over only a limited area around that mountain, receive offerings at times of pilgrimage, etc. In a religious world devoid of "gods", the *lha* are the most socially prominent spiritual beings in an environment filled with many such powers.

[61] Rolf Stein suggested that *lha sras* could be what we call here a bivalent term, amenable to interpretation as "descendent of an ancestral spirit"—*ancêtre, descendu du ciel*—i.e., denoting a member of the nobility, beyond its usual interpretation as a calque-match of *devaputra*. Unfortunately, he does not then follow this position to its conclusion because of his unvarying translation of *lha* as *divin*. (See his "Saint et divin…", note on p. 244.) We should follow here Lévi's research. He understood that rendering *devaputra* as "son of god" based on Hindu and Buddhist sources was neither necessary nor accurate. In fact, the passage from the *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra* he cites on p. 8 (Sylvain Lévi, "Devaputra", JA.224.1934.1–21) shows, in support of our interpretations here, that already in early translations meant to introduce Buddhist notions, those who ruled human beings were called *lha sras* through social convention, and that they were essentially human: *rgyal po rnams kyi skye ba dang / ma yi rum du 'jug gyur te / phyi nas mngal du 'jug par 'gyur / mi yi dbang por gyur pa yin / de ni lha yi sras zhes bya*. This does not accord with ancient Tibetan thinking, insofar as the btsan-pos were conceived of as being something beyond human, and their origins were claimed to be superior on the basis of their ancestry. Tibetan political thought straddled a fine line: btsan-pos were, and needed to be, super-human as warriors, in part because of their *descent* from such ancestors. This separated them categorically from normal human beings, but neither the mythology surrounding them nor religious beliefs about them (except in later Buddhist mythology) lead us to believe that they were conceived of as *gods* in any sense that we understand that term.

Stein is, thus, incorrect when he suggested (p. 245) that *lha sras* is a Buddhist term wherever it occurs. In the Rkong-po inscription, where it occurs frequently, and in PT1287 it certainly is not—it makes no sense to interpret it as such in those documents, where its use fits perfectly as a Tibetan concept, and there is no immediate Buddhist environment. Equally unsatisfactory is the rendering of a passage at SBA BZHED.2000.78 and 90, where the translators equated *lha sras* with "the son of god". In none of the contexts above is this interpretation warranted.

As with *lha*, at what period or in which early document this term switches from being used to express an autochthonous politico-religious concept to being used as the calque of an Indic term is unknown. We may even ask if it ever was clear, during the Imperium and shortly thereafter, that such a change had taken place; *lha sras* is found in neither the *Madhyavyutpatti* nor *Mahāvyutpatti*. This is a mild counter indication that, although Lévi sees the term in the *Suvarṇabhāsasūtra* as an important source of Kushan polity, it may be found in authentically Old Tibetan texts used independently of Hindu or Buddhist coloration (but see below). Also, *mutatis mutandis*, it shares nothing in these texts with the Chinese *tian zi*, if for no other reason than, especially in the *Chronicle* citation here, the category of leadership being discussed is clearly different. In most of its occurrences *lha sras* preserves the idea of inheritance of position. Today, for example, *lha sras* is occasionally used as a term for the most important disciple of a religious teacher. This shows that the meaning of the term has survived, continuing to refer to a linkage between generations implying inheritance. It is not a title for a ruler which has a meaning similar to the Chinese concept. (And this means, interestingly, that even if *tian zi* was originally created as a calque of *devaputra*, *lha sras* was not originally used with the significance of either of these terms in Tibet.)

This makes *lha sras*, which occurs in the earliest Old Tibetan materials in contexts free of Buddhist influences, another example of the adaptation of an Imperial politico-religious term by Buddhism. I state this because it is what the sources give us, but note again that we cannot preclude the possibility that a Buddhist coloring was present very early in the mythology of rule in Tibet. In Chapter One, we saw the many avenues by which such ideas may have entered Tibet very early; included here again would be, of course, the Saka (Iranian) Kingdom of Khotan and the Newar Kingdom of Kathmandu Valley, based on their proximity to Tibet. We also have in mind here the Abhidharma tradition of a *devaputra* who descends from heaven; this

is connected with a Kushan-era use of *devaputra* as a royal title. (On these points see Sylvain Lévi, "Devaputra", JA.224.1934.1–21, pp. 11–13 especially.) Again, following the "additive theory" of titles enunciated in Chapter One, that *lha sras* occurs in non-Buddhist contexts may only show that it was an early borrowing of the term by the court. Its original Buddhist significance was not remembered, but later re-added. This is somewhat supported by the fact that, again, the term is not listed in either the *Mahāvyutpatti* or the *Madhyavyutpatti*.

[62] Some of this thinking, in India, stems from late Vedic beliefs about the ancestors of human beings, the *pañca janāḥ*, who are neither human nor divine, but who returned to their homes to be the heavenly relation (*daivya jana*) of more earthbound descendents. They have an understanding superior to their earthly counterparts, and as such are to be worshipped for providing continuing leadership. (This sounds similar to the idea behind *gtsug lag*.) On these points see A. Coomaraswamy, *The Rg Veda as land-náma-bók*, p. 8f, and Dumézil, *op. cit*., p. 2. On these points see also Shan M.M. Winn, *Heaven, heroes, and happiness: the Indo-European roots of Western ideology*, pp. 206 and 228f, and Bruce Lincoln's ruminations on how, in the Vedas, one can be human and yet go to dwell with the gods or have kinship relations with them, at *Death, war, and sacrifice: studies in ideology and practice*, pp. 122–124.

The world-view sketched here is very similar to the only truly old descriptions we have about the nature of the btsan-pos. The inscriptions teach us that they are of a lineage that came from *gnam* and, when their earthly reign is complete, they *dgung du gshegs*. Since the inscriptions never say that the bstan-pos *die*, we are inclined to consider that this leadership was of such a categorically different nature that human mortality did not apply to them. One important term which may help us understand this special status, *nongs*, is discussed in Chapter Four.

We are thus faced with the interesting example of a non-Indo-European people who have modeled much of their political structure and many of its attendant religious values on theirs. This is perhaps unique in Central Eurasia, since we are not certain of the ethnic origins of the Turkic peoples, whom some feel to have been originally related to the Iranians. The interpretation here of the heavenly-oriented rulers also ratifies the interpretation of the phrase *lha btsan po* given above: These leaders were descended from, and represented, the *lha* on earth, and returned to them in their supernal home after death. Nothing in such a scenario requires us to think of them as gods *per se*, and indeed, such an conception cannot be substantiated.

[63] Many things Buddhist are believed to have had their inception with the rule of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan (r. 754–ca. 799). Nevertheless, caution dictates that we factor in to this the explosion of writing during his reign. The earliest inscriptions date to this period, texts in the Bka' 'Gyur contain references to him in their colophons, and works in the Bstan 'Gyur are attributed to him. This does not preclude, though, that of the many formulations found in them, some predate his reign. When one reads the extended Bsam-yas inscription and accompanying documents in Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag, there are constant references to the support of Buddhism by his father, Mes Ag Tshom, and btsan-pos before him, including Srong Btsan Sgam-po. However, we will always know more about Khri Srong Lde Brtsan and his reign than those of his predecessors because of the voluminous production of his Buddhist scribes.

[64] Questions of the legitimacy of his birth may have been one motivation for this. Both his "move" to Brag Dmar and his building of Bsam-yas served to cement his assertion—far into his reign—that he was the legitimate son of Mes Ag Tshoms, and a legitimate Buddhist ruler. These points are discussed by Christopher Beckwith in his "The revolt of 755 in Tibet".

[65] What I have referred to here as "the additive theory of titles" for rulers is part of the broader process of legitimation. According to Hermann Kulke (*Kings and cults: cult formation and legitimation in India and Southeast Asia*, p. 259f), Brahmanism spread throughout Southeast Asia by the same method. Brahmanism and Buddhism, through

their representatives, Brahmins and Sanghas, could add new status to rulers by promising both to add to personal greatness and to increase avenues to cosmic power.

The legitimate exercise of these powers for state formation was another clear goal. A very similar situation was found in Nepal, whose rulers evolved a religio-political system similar in several details to that of the btsan-pos, a point to which we will return. There, all gifts (*dāna*) by a ruler were accompanied by a *darshan* in which the gods were invited to look down and bless him for fulfilling his duty; "the sacred purpose was that of the king who cast himself in the image of the 'all-providing universal man'...the king would have been hailed as a divine lord in this situation...the king's subjects would have been incorporated within the kingship as constituent parts or extensions of this universal person" (R. Burghart in "Gifts to the Gods: power, property, and ceremonial in Nepal", p. 198f). (If one wishes a materialistic interpretation for the history of *gnam*, it was created because btsan-pos and kings, having occupied such power and status on earth, could not die and pass away in the same way and same environment as the citizens who marched and died for them, and had worshipped them.)

It is uncertain how far into the past one could project this data from the period of the Shah Dynasty. I would only note that everything said about the ruler here has been discussed by Kantorowicz and applies to the concept of *sku* in Tibet centuries before. The obvious similarity to the Cakravartin is also to be borne in mind. Finally, particularly when reading between the lines in the Skar Chung inscription (ll. 17 on), we can see how all Buddhist property in the Imperium was made a similar gift, requiring the same sorts of oaths and witnessing as in the example of Nepal (pp. 201–202). (Of course, through reciprocity, this gifting resulted in the Imperium itself becoming property of the Buddha.) This accords with Greg Schopen's research on who the actual "owner" and presiding presence of Buddhist establishments was, especially as presented in his "Burial ad sanctos and the physical presence of the Buddha in early Indian Buddhism..." and "The Buddha as an owner of property and permanent resident in medieval Indian monasteries". It is also worth noting that the Buddhist establishments are treated in this inscription as if the Buddha were a member of the aristocracy whose property was given to him as a "reward", just as the btsan-pos gave in perpetuity land and privileges to members of their comitatus and other nobility.

[66] The concept of sharing power and devotion is shown in Hindu and Buddhist images in Tibetan monasteries; an example from Sa-skya is in D. Weldon, "Tibetan sculpture inspired by earlier foreign sculptural styles", TJ.27.2002.1–36; cf. fig. 1. *Deva*s in crowd scenes and as esteemed worshippers of the Buddha provide early iconographic evidence for this.

[67] The apposition *lha chos myi chos* occurs in IO370,5 ("'The Dharma that came down from Heaven': a Tun-huang fragment"), which is barely an Old Tibetan text in script, language, or style, despite Richardson's claim in his introduction that it dates to the eighth century. The spellings are nearly entirely classical written Tibetan, and the reference to Rdo-rje Theg removes it from serious consideration as such an early document.

The term *ya rabs* is found in the Skar Chung inscription, lines 37–38, in a situation which distinguishes them as superior to the *'bangs* or ordinary citizenry. In their use since, this term and *lha rabs* have been difficult to distinguish in meaning. Both are used as terms of approval for behavior befitting one's status. For the time being, it seems best to assume that *ya rabs/ma rabs* and *lha chos/mi chos* carry much the same value. The latter pair was most probably the creation of the monastic community. They were created to cover the inclusion of Buddhist ethical values in social behavior. This was important to them, as the development of the latter concepts in Bka'-gdams-pa literature shows. This is why, today, *ya rabs* has preserved very much its original meaning in modern lexicons, while *lha chos* has become synonymous with Buddhism itself, which was not its original meaning.

(One might think that *lha mi*, such a common compound from later Old Tibetan materials on, might have come directly from Indic Buddhist traditions. The com-

pound *devamanuṣya/divyamānuṣa*, the most obvious candidate, however, does not fit here, according to the interpretation by Jean Przyluski in "Les hommes-dieux dans la mythologie bouddhique".JA.230.1938.123–128.)

[68] The *Sba bzhed* version with the closest reading to that quoted in Dpa'-bo is found on p. 62 of SBA BZHED.1982, although on p. 53 of Rolf Stein's *Sba bzhed* version published in Paris in 1961 (*Une chronique ancienne de bSam-yas: sBa-bžed*) there are also some matching passages.

Something interesting arises when one compares the passage in the *Sba bzhed* text published in 1982 with its parallel from Dpa'-bo in note 39 of Chapter One. It actually is much clearer in the latter, by its detail and the order of its passages, that Khri Srong Lde Brtsan is there creating or ratifying, in essence, two societies, one for nobles and one for commoners. The proper customs for ordinary citizens (*mi chos*) did not include an important place in the practice of Buddhism. The more general passage in SBA BZHED.1982 corresponding to Dpa'-bo is: *dus der Blon-po 'Gos kyi mchid nas / "chos ni rgyas par mdzad lags te / da skye bo mi chos kyi lo rgyus kyi bya ba ci gnang" / zhes zhus pas / rje'i gdung rabs dang / 'bangs kyi sa bcad dang / dkon mchog la phyag mchod dang / ya rabs la zhe sa / gtam dang lo rgyus / bzang po'i las thabs dang / lag rjes dang / pha mes kyi dge dang yig tshang gi lugs rgyas par bya bar gnang ngo.*

[69] *yang dag bden chos*, a phrase which shows, again, that for some time—even after the Imperium—*chos* was a pluralistic concept; it had to be qualified to be clearly understood to refer to 'Buddhism'. In the inscriptions and other authentically early Old Tibetan materials, *Sangs-rgyas kyi chos* was frequently used for the same purpose. As noted in Chapter One, n. 84, Khri Srong Lde Brtsan used the phrase *Bod kyi chos rnying pa*, and here we see again clearly why this phrase is ambiguous.

[70] The next-to-last verse is a guess at understanding *'on zhing rnegs*, reading the latter as if it should be written *rnogs*, a *brda rnying* for which *'bod pa* is given as a modern equivalent in Dge-bshes Chos-kyi-grags-pa's dictionary.

[71] We note the similar phrase *dkar chos*, another term usually rendered (perhaps inaccurately) as 'Buddhism'. The term is found, as well, in the *Sba bzhed* tradition, where it is apposed to the Bon tradition at SBA BZHED.2000.95. Its meaning seems certain when compared with the similar phrase *Rgya'i lha chos bzang po* cited (and mistranslated) at "Une lecture...", p. 381. All such phrases not only ameliorate Buddhism, but again illustrate (see note 69 above and elsewhere) that it was necessary to distinguish the correct practice of Buddhism, and perhaps the incorrect practice of Buddhism, from other sorts of *chos*. This attitude, to judge from the *Sba bzhed*, obtained into the Phyi Dar.

[72] A hapax legomenon; apparently, an instrument of divination.

[73] In all likelihood, *lha yul* in these documents—which are late, not Imperial-period—is a Buddhist innovation. Since we cannot be sure that these texts were composed before the *Mahāvyutpatti*, it may be significant that both *lha yul = divi* (#5370) and *lha yul gnas bab pa = devāvatāra* (#4103) are already found there. It is one of the few important compounds with *lha* found in this early Buddhist vocabulary that also occurs in texts such as PT126 and PT239, our most important sources for the introduction of Buddhist concepts about rebirth and the afterlife. It was likely meant to be a Buddhist substitute for *gnam*, which loses its earlier significance as a special heaven for the nobility after the Imperium.

If it was meant as a substitute for *gnam*, we must consider the possibility that *lha yul* was an abode first designed for those in the leadership of the Imperium who were practicing Buddhism. (One of the texts in *Histoire du cycle de la naissance et de la mort*, IO345, was written by Lha Bu Rin Chen Lags. The title *lha bu* is surely to be understood as "son of the nobility"—although rendered 'fils de dieux' by Imaeda on p. 45—and Rin Chen Lags certainly sounds like a Buddhist ordination name.) For the same reason that *lha chos* seems to pre-date *myi chos* as a formulation, *lha yul* may have been designed (or, better, re-designed) to help provide a complete Buddhist

environment for the nobility, including a way to practice Buddhism and achieve the post-mortem world of their ancestors at the same time.

[74] There is evidence for control of the relationship between a leadership and its ancestral spiritual beings by Sanghas throughout Asia. Here are just a few examples, presented in brief.

The spiritual guardians of Luang Prabang, the *devata luang*, still exist and are an integral part of festivals absorbed by Buddhism and now overseen by monks. "…[T]here is an important cult devoted to King Borom, his immediate successors, and the more charismatic of the later kings; and the structure of this cult confirms the hierarchic position of the dynasty suggested by the imagery of adoption. Those in the royal line clearly possess the potential for divinity; they are capable of attaining the post-mortem status of guardian deities…And it is clear that those who did achieve apotheosis hold a position beneath that of the *devata luang*, that they exercise less continuing power. This is reflected in the lesser importance of the cult which is devoted to them and by the fact that its maintenance is the responsibility of the royal family rather than the community as a whole." (Frank Reynolds, "Ritual and social hierarchy: an aspect of traditional religion in Buddhist Laos". *History of religions*.9.1969.78–89.168.) The author is describing the place of this politico-religious structure within monk-controlled festivals which have absorbed these "pre-Buddhist" political elements, primarily to show their subservient position within Buddhist cosmological and other doctrinal categories (p. 169). (One could imagine something very similar in Tibet had the "Yar Lung Dynasty" not collapsed precipitously, but had simply lost its hold over that society: Perhaps there would be today in Lhasa a cultus surrounding a royal family in the hands of monks similar to the later examples from Thailand, Laos, and elsewhere.) In any event, the spirit world surrounding the dynasty, and the fall of status of their spirits, is sufficiently similar to the Tibetan example of the *lha* to provide a reasonable analogy.

We rarely obtain a glimpse of the thinking from the side of the royalty about the place of kingship in a Buddhist system, but we have it for fourteenth-century Thailand in the *Traibhūmikathā* of Prince (later King) Phya Lithai. It is precisely in this cosmological text (published as *Three worlds according to King Ruang* in the translation of Frank E. and Mani B. Reynolds) that he, with the approval of the Sangha, as the editors and translators of his text assume, discusses the special nature of rulers. In the opening of its sixth chapter, "The realms of the Devatā" (p. 217), he describes the position of rulers as: "As for *devatā* there are three kinds. One kind are called *devatā* by common agreement; another kind are called *devatā* by birth; another kind are called *devatā* by purity. The rulers and kings in this land of ours, if they know basic principles, know merit, know Dhamma, and act in accordance with all ten of the Dhammic rules for kings, are called *devatā* by common agreement." This turns out to be the lowest form of *devatā*, and the category is little discussed further in this work. (This discussion recalls that concerning the concept of *devaputra* in the *Suvarṇabhāsasūtra* quoted above. It is clear that one reason for Buddhism to support the idea that rulership proceeds from social mechanisms rather than divine origins is that it facilitates the superior position of a Sangha at court.)

Again, this helps us understand why the early Sangha in Tibet equated the *lha* with *deva*. The status the latter enjoyed in India and Nepal would have been known at the Tibetan court, and this in turn would have motivated the Sangha there to create the identity.

King Phya Lithai certainly had numerous political agendas for composing this work in the way he did (*op. cit.*, p. 10), but it is, overall, a detailed example of the successful placement of a previously divine or semi-divine royal lineage in an elevated, but seemingly modest status, in a Buddhist universe. With the Sangha to guide him, of course, his destiny could yet become great within a Buddhist universe, and he could climb up

to be a Cakravartin, a status much discussed in this work, and, in fact, all works on rulers in Buddhist societies. In the end, the ancient spirits of the royal lineage were subdued, but the power of the ruler was on the other hand enhanced, a traditional Buddhist model for success at courts.

One further example from a very different culture may be brought forward to show that the same pattern applied. At the Central Asian Tangut court, we see the dynamic of control of ancestral spirits and the gradual progression of status of the Sangha as it redirected the nature of the government to bring it under the control and protection of a Buddhist ritual and cosmological structure. Again, this had significant implications for ameliorating the ruler's position much above that of simply being a living representative of his ancestral spirits. On these points and their close similarity to the earlier Tibetan situation, see R. Dunnell, *The great state of White and High*. On p. 40, quoting the *Song shi* (cf. p. 28): "In the eleventh month the new emperor traveled to Xiliangfu (Liangzhou or Wuwei) to make sacrifices to the spirits (*cishen*); the term indicates ancestral spirits but probably also included ceremonies at the Buddhist temples of Liangzhou, which were to play a vital role in the state religious establishment." (Almost certainly, the Sangha allowed much of the earlier court religious belief in ancestral spirits to continue, but within a Buddhist political cosmology.) On p. 47: "The *dharmarāja* and *cakravartin*-conqueror swore a blood oath with his chieftains and appealed to geography and ethno historical genealogy to buttress his claim to rule." (The blood oath maintained here is first mentioned as one of the rites of ascendance to the throne on p. 40. This shows that the ruler's comitatus was preserved at the same time as he became a consecrated Buddhist emperor. This is an important consideration when interpreting the relationship between a comitatus, oathing and Buddhism at the Imperial court in Tibet.) And, on p. 68: "Aside from ritual and educational activities of the throne, high-ranking monks at the capital played a vital role in imperial preparations for military campaigns or defense against attacks by foreign armies." (The context makes it clear that the Sangha's status was elevated both because of its military and other services to the court, as well as because the monks were of the nobility, and even the royal family. In return for hearing the confession of the Emperor Weiming Huizong (r. 1068–1086), they accorded him many titles suggestive of being a model ruler supporting Buddhism. The first among these was Tiansheng, "Heaven-born", a term translated from the Tangut. Thus, they were established as first among the protectors and interpreters of his reign.)

The uniform manner in which Sanghas at various courts dealt with the structures of the spirit worlds surrounding them helps explain how the fall in status of the spirit-protectors (*lha*) of the rulers of ancient Tibet fits into their placement in the new cosmology. That process is most clearly shown for the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan. This pattern is so clear, however, that it stimulates thinking about understanding other changes at courts around the Buddhist world as being the effects of similar mechanisms. Data for the Tangut court here is especially valuable. Neighbors of the Tibetans, the Tanguts originated in northeastern Tibet and spoke a Tibeto-Burman language termed Qiangic. Their court, however, adopted Chinese Buddhism rather than Tibetan, and its Sangha translated its Buddhist canon from Chinese. We thus have neighboring nations influenced by Mahayana Buddhisms from different cultures at different times for which Sanghas nevertheless display very similar strategies in their politico-religious relations.

[75] There certainly was a transitional period, and local considerations produced nuances. For example, in the work popularly known as the *Gu-ru Bkra-shis chos 'byung* of Ngag-dbang-blo-gros (b. 1775), there is a discussion of the spread of Buddhism in the period between Gnya' Khri Btsan-po and Mes Ag Tshoms (quoting p. 141 of the 1990 Lhasa edition). Here there is an interesting passage, found in variants in numerous 'historical' works, citing what was certainly a Phyi Dar tradition about the nature of Tibet before the coming of Buddhism. A variety of spiritual beings, later converted by Avalokiteśvara, controlled portions of that country. Klu, Dmu, 'Dre, Rgyal-po, etc.,

are named among these sorts of Mi-ma-yin. We quote this passage from its opening: *de yang thog mar gnod sbyin gyis bzung ste yul ming Bzang yul rgyan med dang / de nas bdud kyis bzung ste / bdud yul Kha rag mgo dgu / de nas srin-pos bzung nas Srin-po nag-po dgu yul / de nas lhas bzung ste Lha yul gung thang…*

A similar list is given in the *Mkhas-pa Lde'u* (late thirteenth century; cited at H. Linnenborn, *Die frühen Könige von Tibet und ihre Konstruktion in den religiösen Überlieferungen*, p. 304). These accounts are almost certainly the relics of the early post-Imperial Buddhicization of Tibet, when the action of Tibetans in earlier periods had to be considered wanting in contrast with the way in which the country was considered blessed after it became Avalokiteśvara's domain (on which see Chapter Four).

In contrast to the fabulous names of some of the "areas" in this list, the reference to Gung Thang is interesting. In the opening lines of the *Chronicle*, the sons of the slain Dri Gum Btsan-po flee to Gung Dang, an Old Tibetan spelling for Gung Thang. A. MacDonald, in "Une lecture…", p. 343, lists several passages in Dunhuang texts where this place name occurs, and in most it is Lha Yul Gung Dang/Thang. Along with this occurrence, I believe we are justified in considering the earlier name of the country to be, indeed, that phrase, not simply Gung Thang. In these works, the notion that the Lha "possessed" Gung Thang was its principal characteristic. This, of course, became a code for the legitimacy of its rulers as successors of the btsan-pos. There are early prophecies of Gung Thang being a refuge of the *lha sras gdung brgyud* (*Gu-ru Bkra-shis chos 'byung*, *op. cit.*, p. 165). Such a tradition would have been reinforced by the (probably) later tradition according to which Mang Yul Gung Thang was the repository of an important image of Śākyamuni (see SBA BZHED.2000.38).

Traditions in Kaḥ-thog Tshe-dbang-nor-bu's *Bod Rje Lha Btsan-po'i gdung rabs Mnga' Ri*[*s*] *smad Gung Thang du ji ltar byung ba'i tshul Deb ther Dwangs shel 'phrul gyi me long* expand on this. Some time during the reign of Rgyal-po Gnam Ri Srong Btsan (note the anachronistic title *rgyal po* and the later form of the ruler's imperial throne name), three courtiers with their entourages came to this area searching for land. This set into motion the process whereby the area was claimed for that ruler and populated. Aside from providing a set of references which creates a nearly continual connection between Mang Yul and btsan-pos, we find an interesting method for claiming that the area should long have been known as a *lha yul* is this brief passage:…*Gung Thang shar la'i rtser slebs tshe bltas pas ljongs bzangs po mthong nas* <u>*rmog la chol phor*</u>* *byas te yul rgyan du dor te bsgos pas / rgyan po che rim gyi 'dzang gshong lha sdong gsum mes po pha tsher 'thug pos 'dzang gzhung thob*, i.e., "When they reached the eastern pass into Gung Thang and looked, they saw that the land was good. Then, making a dice-cup from a helmet, they divided the country into lots (*rgyan*, appointed divisions) and shared them out (through dice rolls)…"

This may recount an ancient practice. As courtiers and members of the btsan-po's comitatus, they used dice-divination on behalf of the btsan-po to claim the area and allow themselves to take parcels as their reward. If accurate, this is an interesting window into the custom used to establish lands on behalf of the btsan-po that belonged to the comitatus membership. We will find other instances of the use of dice in determining government actions. (For a more general translation, see Karl-Heinz Everding, *Das Königreich Mang yul Gung thang*, an edition and translation of Kaḥ-thog Tshe-dbang-nor-bu's *Bod Rje Lha Btsan-po'i gdung rabs Mnga'-ri[s] smad Gung Thang du ji ltar byung ba'i tshul Deb ther Dwangs shel 'phrul gyi me long*, v. 1, p. 47. On other uses of dice divination in the Imperium, see Brandon Dotson, "Divination and law in the Tibetan Empire: the role of dice in the legislation of loans, interest, marital law and troop conscription".)

* *rmog phor* at BRDA DKROL.672 may be an abbreviation for this phrase; however, in that dictionary this term is explained as the equivalent of two other terms used to describe a helmet, *rmog zhwa* and *lcags zhu rmog phor*.

CHAPTER THREE

RITUALS IN THE IMPERIUM AND LATER: CONTINUITY IN THE RITUALS OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM

This chapter analyzes some rites that are either overtly political or have political implications. Although it would be preferable not to simply list them and provide minimal descriptions, we lack the data to see most of them clearly in their court environment. Further, many political rituals are by nature performed *ad hoc*. We can find no over-arching ideology in the Imperium beyond the superiority of the btsan-pos that legitimized their leadership, so we should not expect to find a grand design into which these rites were fit beyond their immediate usefulness to the government. If the additive principle concerning religious practitioners at courts enunciated in the first chapter is valid, rites would have been added as they were considered to be beneficial. Thus, no matter what rituals we look at, it is difficult to find in them an over-all picture of court religious life.

The value of studying these rites is not only that they are interesting *per se*, but also because most continued to be significant, with little change, at later courts, including the Dga'-ldan Pho-brang. The fall of the Imperium did not relieve Tibetan rulers of the need for ritual methods to stabilize or expand political power. If anything, it increased that need. Buddhist traditions adapted these rites to meet changing needs. These include the most fundamental customs, such as oathing and ceremonies to benefit the religious and political elite.

Before beginning our brief enumeration of only a few broad categories, a general note on ritual and Tibetan Buddhism is in order. There is a vast, largely unstudied literature, particularly in the works of the Rnying-ma tradition, in which many rites are described. Some of these are designed to benefit either "Tibet" (Bod) in general—whatever that actually means in a particular context, which is a subject worthy of a separate study—or a part of it. Many of these rituals are aimed at pacifying local spiritual beings, and achieving this entails bringing stability and prosperity to that area. Most are aimed primarily at the health and well-being of Tibetans, their livestock, etc., which are long-standing responsibilities of local lamas. They sometimes contain

references to the Imperium or btsan-pos, or use terms from that time. While these are nearly always anachronistic, they are valuable resources because they give us a view of the btsan-pos complementary to their fixed interpretation in the mythology of the later Buddhist traditions. Moreover, some texts may, in fact, contain data about practices at the courts of the btsan-pos which were embedded within Tantric Buddhist ritual, either late in the Imperium or shortly after.[1] Before we can claim to understand the relationship between Buddhism and local culture in Tibet, with its political and social implications, we need to examine these materials. Rituals to benefit Tibet likewise give us a concept of 'Bod' which complements its presentation in historical sources. These materials are also worthwhile to study because, objectively considered, such rituals are the most valuable services many monks and lamas ever performed for those under their care.

rim gro, sku rim

Let us begin with the oldest and most well-attested court rites, *rim gro* and *sku rim*. What is the fundamental meaning and relationship of these terms?

To address the first part of this question, we have recourse to the *Mahāvyutpatti* and *Madhyavyutpatti*. The former term occurs at MV.1578 (*rim gro bya ba bla na med pa = paricaryānuttaryam*), 1762 (*rim gro* or *rim gror bya ba = upasthānam*), and 5565 (*rim gro'i gnas = upasthānaśālā*). Its earliest citation in a Tibetan dictionary is in the *Li shi gur khang* from the fifteenth century—the oldest Tibetan dictionary—where it is equated with *satkāra*. In order, these four definitions amount to: the ultimate form of service/worship to be made; attending/worshipping; the hall where this is done; and, veneration/worshipful praise/religious observance (*satkāra* is also equated in MV.1760 with *bkur bstir byed pa*, to pay honor or reverence).[2] The pattern of usage here agrees *in general* with its use in Old Tibetan sources. However, all these definitions are vague (i.e., they display a wide semantic range), and we need to understand more precisely—if we can—what these terms meant. As with Sku Bla, the terms almost certainly had earlier, more precise applications that we no longer clearly understand, and some reinterpretation necessarily accompanied their equivalence with Indic terms. Unlike Sku Bla, though, these terms passed into the Phyi Dar in a variety of contexts, both Bon and Chos.

Based on the Rkong-po inscription cited in Chapter Two, we know that it was a sort of *cho ga*, another term used in Buddhism, where it is the equivalent of *vidhi*. The latter is a cover term which really describes a method or set way of doing something, including performing a ritual. Since the earliest occurrence of *cho ga* is in connection with the court of the Imperium, it would seem that even then *cho ga* as "ritual" or "rite" was a categorical, or general, term describing the correct form or way of performing something for the benefit of the btsan-po or Imperium. This is in keeping with the nearly universal belief that, in order to be efficacious, a ritual must be performed in the "correct" way. Thus, *rim gro* finds its earliest equivalence in MDV.126, where *cho ga zhib mo* is equated with *kalpaḥ*, "rule for a ritual". The Rkong-po passage thus tells us that the *sku*[*ï*] *rïm gro* was a particular example of a structured ritual act, under the general rubric *cho ga*. With reference to healing rites, PT1051 also apposes *cho ga* and *rim gro*. *rim gro* thus also seems to have been, or became early, a cover term for a number of rites.[3] Already, we are beginning to move away from the meanings assigned to them by their Indic equivalents (assuming we understand *their* encultured meanings clearly).

The earliest citation of *rim gro* is in an inscription found at Lho Brag, which is most likely from the Imperial period; lines 3–4 read (LI & COBLIN.355), *Lde'u Cung gi mchad gyï rïm gro bla nas mdzad de*…, "The religious observations of Lde'u Cung's tomb were performed by the government…" At first glance, the drama of the Rkong-po narrative in describing a *sku*[*ï*] *rïm gro* is difficult to reconcile with the dry Lho Brag description, which doesn't refer to any great personal effort. Since we have no idea of the contents of these rites, we cannot draw any conclusions, although the second quote from the SBA BZHED, below, shows that *sku rim* rites were a matter for the highly-placed at court. We at least know that we are dealing with rites that directly involved btsan-pos, alive and dead, and other high officials.

This phrase was adapted at some early time, as shown above, to be a translation term for a Buddhist, and specifically an Indic Buddhist, concept. As we have no details about the nature of these rites in Old Tibetan materials, and little data, we must have recourse to these phrases in Buddhist contexts to help us understand them more completely. This may, in turn, help us see how such concepts were "Buddhacized". This process, it is clear, began with utilizing the prestige value of these terms at court, and it is equally clear that, when Sanghas began to use them, they added rites of their own under their rubric. It is certain that they

further changed when the individuals for whom many of these rites were performed—the btsan-pos—no longer existed.

Except for the following examples from Old Tibetan texts, we now shift to data from Phyi Dar sources. *rim gro* is explained to be an abbreviation for *rim bzhin du legs pa'i lam du gro ba* in the "Tibetan commentarial tradition" as quoted by Helmut Eimer and Pema Tsering.[4] In that same article the authors describe the sorts of rituals which are covered by this term in the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, and they cite other examples from the Rnying-ma tradition to show that here also *rim gro* is a cover term, much like *cho ga/vidhi*. Rnying-ma authors, of course, trace these practices back to Buddhists of Imperial times, such as Padmasambhava. From the side of the Dge-lugs-pa, the Fifth Dalai Lama gives considerable details about what it meant as a categorical term in the Gsar-ma context and how this related to its use in some mainline Mahāyāna materials.

Earlier than either of these interpretations, we have the use of *rim gro* several times in the translation of the *Ratnaguṇasañcayagāthā*, in which it appears as an equivalent of *pūjā, pra-yūj*, and *pari-car*. However, the context of one of its citations there is interesting. In the edition of the (irregular) Sanskrit and Tibetan versions of the text[5] we have the following second half of verse 2, chapter 4: *yatha rājaniśritanaro labhi sarvi pūjāṃ, tatha Prajñparāmitaniśritabuddhadhātuḥ*, with the translation *dper na rgyal po brten mi rim gro thob pa ltar / Sangs Rgyas ring bsrel Shes rab pha rol phyin la brten*. "Just as all men depending on a king get *pūjā/rim gro*, so also the relics of the Buddha (achieve all by) being based on the Prajñāpāramitā." Here we encounter *rim gro* as the equivalent of an act of respect. However, based on how we see *rim gro* used in ancient documents, *pūjā* is hardly sufficient as an equivalent, and it indicates that the translators were more concerned with re-interpreting the court life of Tibet's past to make the btsan-pos seem more Buddhist than in finding an encultured Sanskrit equivalent. And, from the Tibetan side, *mchod pa* 'offering' was even then the accepted equivalent of *pūjā*.

This is a good example of how the original meanings of "pre-Buddhist" terms were changed and then lost. Either it was not considered important to render their meanings precisely because translators considered them antiquated, or their original meanings had already been lost. This helps explain the numerous equivalents for *sku rim/rim gro* in the early Buddhist vocabularies quoted above. We speculated

above that late Imperial monks creating these equivalents were also reflecting a change in court practices. An obvious trend we see in the *Ratnaguṇasañcayagāthā* quote is that the translators were intent on replacing the earlier meaning of *rim gro* with offerings to Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, etc. This tells us that faith in them was replacing, or meant to replace, the power of other forces, such as the ancestral *lha*. The *sku rim* rite discussed below is another example of the replacement of service (and faith) in the power of the btsan-pos with faith in the power of Buddhist spiritual beings. (See Chapter Two, n. 74, for considerations of the ways Sanghas subsumed rulers and their supporting powers within Buddhist cosmologies.)

This helps us understand why there is too little data to allow a detailed comparison between the earlier uses of *rim gro* at court and its later use in Buddhist traditions. However, we can say a few things about the earlier values of the term: One, as stated above, it was acknowledged to be a subset of an over-all ritual structure, *cho ga*, a categorical term also used in a general way by Buddhists. Two, *rim* provides yet another interesting connection with Indic modes of religious thinking. It is glossed by *krama* or *vidhi*, and these equations seem informative about its essential nature, i.e., that ritual success was determined by the structure of the rite. Three, there is nothing that we know of that excludes Buddhists from having performed any *rim gro* at court. Monks participated in funeral, confession, and other rites for btsan-pos, and we have no knowledge of any that they were excluded from. (This list greatly expands if the quotations attributed to Khri Srong Lde Brtsan in the history of Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag and the *Sba bzhed* material below are accurate for the reign of Khri Srong.) One term we encounter for practitioners is *rim gro ba* (rendered *upasthāyaka* or *paricāraka*), which occurs from late Old Tibetan (i.e., post-Imperial) through Buddhist ritual texts to the present time. We may conclude from the *Sba bzhed* and other materials cited here that this category also covered rites performed by *blon-po*s, at least in some critical circumstances. In sources from later times we find general descriptions of what their functions were.[6] The standard lexicons are not much help for details, but the continuity of service is interesting; cf. DUNG DKAR.2002.1917, "a general designation for attendants (*nye gnas*) who offer services before lamas", which is more specific than the definition in Jäschke. We at least can see the expected, that the office of *rim gro ba* transited from serving the

bla, the Imperial government, to serving *bla ma*s, the representatives of the new, Buddhist administrations. In neither period was it a trivial position; some *rim gro ba*s were *phyag mdzod* or other high-ranking monks, and they are often mentioned in contexts of importance.

If the Indic lexical equivalents are too semantically diverse to be very helpful, and data from the later Tibetan traditions too removed in time, the *Sba bzhed* tradition may be utilized profitably, if with care. It is our oldest Phyi Dar source on this rite. It has special credibility because of its relative age, because it is supposed to represent the faithful service of the Sba clan members of the Sangha—whose members were prominent at Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's court—and because it is, along with the *Bka' gdams glegs bam* and *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum* materials, the most prominent transitional source we have. It is for these reasons that we may hope the descriptions of *rim gro* there provide some insight into its value at courts in the Imperium. Our confidence in this data is partly based on the fact that here the btsan-po remains the object of these ritual efforts, even though he is referred to here as *rgyal po*.

There are actually three different phrasings found in SBA BZHED.1982: *rim gro, sku'i rim gro*, and *rje'i sku'i rim gro*. These variants may reflect a difference in, or different nuance among, these phrases, especially since *rim gro* is a categorical term. However, in the *Sba bzhed* traditions, which contain the only detailed descriptions of these rites involving a btsan-po, the terms seem to be used indiscriminately.[7] Is this because, by the time of their compilation, any distinctions may have become blurred? Are these all scoped phrases? Or was there always a flexibility in the choice of these terms?

On p. 4 we have: *phyis Kong Jo la yos bu'i lo la rgyal bu chags / de'i dus na rgyal po ni pho brang Brag Dmar 'Om-bu'i-tshal na bzhugs / yos bu'i lo dpyid zla ra ba'i tshes gsum la bab pa na / Rgya'i hwa shang mngon shes yod pa zhig na re / rgyal po khyod kyi btsun mo la sras byang chub sems dpar nges pa cig btsal (*i.e., *btsa') bar nges / de la rim gro skyed cig ces zer / rgyal pos nam phyed la mchod rten brgya rtsa bzhengs / 'jim pa lhag ma la nga'i sku tshab byed gsungs nas / mchod rten gres* [DPA'-BO: *dres*] *thag can yang brtsigs / nang par pho nya byung ste Kong Jo la sras gcig bltams so zhes zer.* [Cf. the similar narrative at DPA'-BO.1962.Ja.72v4/DPA'-BO.1985.297.9ff]

The order to construct stūpas is a rite serving various purposes, and this shows that it was one sort of *rim gro* at court. The order that a clay model of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan be built is interesting; this is a motif we encounter further at SBA BZHED.1982.39, where members

of the royal family pose for statues at Bsam-yas. (This reminds one of Kushan custom. Yet, we must ask what its religious significance may have been.) The idea of the btsan-po being in the care of Buddhists, here Chinese, to ensure the birth of a bodhisattva by his queen, is an example of the central message of the *Sba bzhed* materials (as well as PT016, etc.), i.e., that the Sangha at court bore the responsibility for healing, supporting and continuing his *gdung rabs*, i.e., his bodhisattva lineage.[8] (Whether the monks were foreign or not is immaterial; the importance of foreign Sanghas at court is a fixed element in Phyi Dar representations of Buddhism in the Imperium.) This accords with the Buddhist sentiments expressed in the 'Phyong Rgyas inscription referred to above.

There is one other detailed description in the *Sba bzhed*. We find it in a narrative purporting to describe one episode in the establishment of Buddhism. The concepts are used with an authentically ancient meaning, including the interrelationship of *sku* and *chab srid* as described in the inscriptions. This scenario also helps provide a context in which to judge the Rkong-po narration studied in Chapter Two, as it shows that effort by the highest advisors could be an important element in a *sku'i rim gro*.

On pp. 16–17 we have: *Blon Chen-po 'Gos Khri Bzang Yab Lhag na re / de la thabs bgyi bar rngo thog gis kho bo'i rjes su rting gnon mdzad* [*mdzod cig*] */ slad nas rjes* [*rje'i*] *dgongs pa sgrub bo zer de ltar chad byas / Blon Khri Bzang gis bla 'og gi phyag sprin* [*pa*] *dang / mo pa* [*ma*] *dang ltas mkhan kun la lkog tu bya dga' bstsal nas / rgyal bu* [*rgyal po*] *sku chags che / chab srid la gnod pa 'ong par lung mthun par smrar bstsal / de la ji ltar bya ba'i lung smrar bstsal ba las* [*la*] */ rje'i sku'i rim gror Zhang Blon su che ba zung gcig / dgung lo gsum* <u>*chad par dal (dur) du*</u> [*mchad pa'i nang du dal du*] *bcug na rje'i sku tshe dang chab srid 'phel lo zhes lung phog*. [Variant readings in brackets are from DPA'-BO.1985.311; cf. also the text at SBA BZHED.1961.13.]

This quote immediately follows a criticism of Zhang Ma Zhang, whose distaste for Buddhism restrained its development. "The great advisor 'Gos Khri Bzang Yab Lhag (see Chapter Two, n. 68) said, 'While we are making efforts (on behalf of Buddhism), act for the benefit (of Buddhism) to suppress the consequences which follow him.' Subsequently, (Khri Srong Lde Brtsan) made his decision according to that, saying, '(This) intention of (the btsan-po) is to be realized.' After the advisor Khri Bzang sought all *phyag sprin* (messengers) who served the Imperium,* all diviners and interpreters of omens, bestowing

upon them gifts in secret, he sought them to give forth a unanimous prophecy, 'The *sku* of the young king achieved majority;** (however,) there is going to be damage to his Imperium.' Because he sought them to bring forth a prophecy about what could be done for this, they gave forth (such a) prophecy, 'For a *rim gro* of the *sku* of the lord, whoever are the greatest Zhang and (other) advisor, if the pair of them calmly enter a tomb (and stay thus) for three years, the lifetime of the *sku* of the btsan-po and the Imperium will increase.'"

* *bla 'og gi phyag sprin*. An obscure phrase; perhaps: "All who were in government service".

** 1961 reads *rgyal bu'i sku*; a genitive is to be expected here.

These passages support the assertion, first expressed in the Rkong-po inscription, that *sku'i rim gro* was a subset of *rim gro* that dealt especially with the protection of the *sku* of the btsan-po, his sacral body, coterminous with the Imperium itself.[9] The second quote agrees with the Rkong-po inscription that *sku rim* was a potentially serious, even life-threatening, ritual undertaking, centered in the court and involving highly-placed advisors. That it proved fatal to Zhang Ma Zhang through a trick which was perhaps really a dramatic device—a moralistic re-interpretation of a *sku rim* rite meant to emphasize the vicissitudes which faced the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet, a *cliché* of later Tibetan historiography—should not dissuade us from seeing behind it a *rim gro* centering on scape-goating, a sort of *glud*, another categorical term for an important set of ancient Tibetan rites.

What we learn from these and other Old Tibetan and *Sba bzhed* passages is that a *rim gro* could be performed after the fact, which was either a victory, a death, or, as an act deemed to support the *chab srid*—some outstanding ritual service to the government. Second, it could be performed *by* the government, but we do not have a clear idea how many sorts of people were involved: btsan-pos, sometimes; ministers, according to the *Sba bzhed*, and—most importantly in the present work—the Bcom-ldan 'Das-kyi Ring Lugs, the official commission of monks which oversaw the behavior and responsibilities of the Sangha *vis-à-vis* the government of the Imperium. Few facts show the intimate relationship of the Sangha with the inner workings of the court as clearly as this evidence. And, if the *Sba bzhed* narratives are accurate, the *rim gro/sku rim gro/rje'i sku'i rim gro* complex was just one element of a complex of rituals by which monks looked after the *sku* of the btsan pos, from early in their life to their funeral rites.[10]

After the fall of the Imperium, as discussed above, the forms and uses of *rim gro* must have gone in a different direction. The btsan-po and his *sku* were gone; the Imperium was gone. At the same time, from the early Phyi Dar until the present, *rim gro* has remained, as it had been, a cover term for a variety of rituals. It is no surprise, then, that it would be difficult to project data from these later sources into the Imperial period with any confidence that they accurately reflected what had taken place. In a general way, however, Buddhism continued the essence of the *rim gro* tradition, exampled first in the Rkong-po inscription in the concept *Lha Sras kyï sku'i rïm gro*, by creating a set of rites to protect politically important individuals and, through them again, Tibet itself, however one defines it.[11] The outstanding characteristic of these is service to the presence (*sku*) of Buddhist spiritual beings and their representatives. Its importance as an object of ritual completes the picture for us that the earlier significance of *sku* was taken over and maintained by the various Buddhist traditions in Tibet. It has retained its earlier, primarily political significance in ritual, mythic and doctrinal contexts. In other words, what had been rites designed to protect the Imperium by defending the person of the btsan-po became rites designed to aid and protect other individuals who were also perceived to have special origin and status, and who were protecting another sort of Tibet. Power was now centered on faith in the Triratna (Dkon Mchog Gsum) and Buddhist spiritual beings to protect them. This system was largely based on statements in the political passages of important Buddhist materials upon which Tibetans placed their faith in post-Imperial times. (An excellent example of this transfer is the activities of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan, on which see n. 9 in this chapter.)

This introduces a central problem in an historical analysis of these rites. Collections of rituals, and Tibetan authors who have surveyed these practices, claim that there are (at least) two sorts of *rim gro* rites. In the final analysis, however, this distinction is based on false premises, because later tradition has clearly carried forward some ancient rites under this rubric while incorporating others in the Buddhist category as the result of translations that used, e.g., *rim gro* to render *pūjā* and other Indic terms, as exampled above. Since new rituals were also being brought in from Sūtras and Tantras that were included under this cover term, the rituals of the Phyi Dar are a complex of newly imported as well as older rituals that were either recognized as such or were gathered under Indic terminology. Thus, we have some rituals

called *rim gro* which are explicitly stated to be based on passages in Sūtras and others that are excluded from having such an origin.[12] This is a good example of how *rim gro* functioned as a categorical, or cover, term: New applications of the same general sort were gathered under a general terminology that had originated in the Imperium.

This is why it is difficult to consider *rim gro* to have been fundamentally healing rites during the Imperial period, as has been asserted (see n. 9). Some examples of its use from the later *Sba bzhed* may be considered "healing rites" in a very general way, and there are also numerous references to its use in healing, beginning with later Old Tibetan materials, including divination texts. As a categorical term, we should expect that it covered a variety of applications. Overcoming illness and dealing with famine and social upset are the most prominently mentioned purposes for conducting rites in Tibet. However, of greatest interest here is how the *Sba bzhed* emphasizes that care of the *sku* of the btsan-po had transited nearly completely to the Sangha.

Whatever specialized purposes *rim gro*, etc., served, it should be kept in mind that only two groups are mentioned as responsible for their performance. They are performed by government officials in the early examples, e.g., the Rkong-po narrative, the Lho Brag inscription, and even in the *Sba bzhed* narrative of the entombment of Zhang Ma Zhang, in which the *rje'i sku'i rim gro* may have been reworked as a dramatic device. Other examples in the *Sba bzhed*, of course, are performed by monks. Interestingly, we have no evidence that *any other group* of religious practitioners at court provided such services. It is highly unlikely that a Sangha could have come in and taken these important functions away from others without some note being made of it. Indeed, even later sources obsessed with 'Bon *vs*. Chos' during the Imperium do not assert this. (They usually limit themselves to making such assertions about Imperial funeral rites, discussed below.) Therefore, we are left with a vision of the function of the Sanghas at courts that is generally in accord with the picture presented by the *Sba bzhed* in its description of rituals to serve the btsan-pos.

Oathing rites, cup rites

The central role of oathing was demonstrated in the first chapter. Taking an oath at a court was a matter that, potentially at least, involved one's life. It was the contractual glue that held the court together and ensured

that policies were instituted, strategies executed, etc. Insofar as there was a society at court and among the leadership of the clans, etc., it was created and maintained by oaths.[13] When the Tibetans executed international treaty rites these, of course, reflected the same values. This shows that oathing was a commonly accepted diplomatic practice of its day, as we saw in Chapter One, n. 24. The religious dimension of these rites was calling to witness their chief spiritual beings, in the case of Tibetans their *lha*, who saw that the members adhered to their oaths. Those who violated them were cursed to meet the same fate as the animals sacrificed to seal it. This allows us to extrapolate a similar fate for those who violated oaths within the court. However, we can also infer, from data in the Tang historical sources, that the prestige of one's clan and descendents, based on martial achievement, was cemented by their inclusion at court through such rites. (That is, they were being added to the comitatus of the btsan-po.) This status would be damaged if an individual did not honor his oath. (For more, see the data on *yul lha*, below.) Thus, on the level of the court and comitatus, oathing probably worked very well to create political unity. However, the further removed from court such oathed or subject leaders were, the less well this system worked to create a broader unity because local concerns would trump efforts to maintain an oath to a distant btsan-po as first priority.[14]

It is not difficult to find oathing rites throughout written Tibetan materials, from the earliest inscriptions to the most recent period. Let us look at these rites in Phyi Dar times in somewhat more detail, because it is an important legacy of Imperial times. Oathing was a religio-political rite throughout pre-modern Central Eurasia, and beyond, and a defining characteristic of the Central Eurasian Culture Complex. The religious values attached to it varied from culture to culture, of course. Thus, again, we learn something about the special nature of Tibet's religio-political system, and how it was executed in a practical way, from the following data.

Once again, our earliest important Phyi Dar source is the *Sba bzhed* tradition. One need not accept the historicity of the narrative about the subduing of spiritual beings by Padmasambhava and Śāntarakṣita narrated there to be struck by the fact that the success of the former's efforts was seen to be based on his ability to compel Tibet's spiritual beings to accept *oaths* to support Buddhism. This is a neat dovetailing of Tantric ritual practice with pre-existing Tibetan beliefs about the means for ensuring peace and stability among human and non-human

beings. Did the late Imperial Tantric tradition, under the guise of 'Padmasambhava', tailor its approach to Tibet's spiritual beings to agree with practices well known at its courts? We know that binding by oath was a customary Tibetan court practice, and that this applied also to the spiritual beings who were close to those involved. Subduing negative forces and "transforming" them into beings supporting Buddhism would have made sense to Khri Srong Lde Brtsan and other leaders. This is why the work of Padmasambhava is presented the way it is: He was seen to be successful because he was following an accepted model in using oathing rituals of a new sort to bring order to a world of spiritual beings surrounding the court and the Imperium.[15]

At one of those moments of doubt in the dramatic narrative of the *Sba bzhed*, 'Gos Khri Bzang Yab Lhag advises Khri Srong Lde Brtsan that only by binding his subjects to support Buddhism will it be possible to institute that religion.[16] This both dramatically presages the Bsam-yas edict, with its concluding oaths, and complements the activities tradition ascribes to Padmasambhava. While the latter pacifies unruly forces in his kingdom, Khri Srong Lde Brtsan establishes Buddhism through a covenant between a (Bodhisattva) ruler and his subjects which rests on what is essentially a way for the btsan-po to determine who is loyal to his edict, and who not. In both cases, success is achieved through the use of oathing.

Let us pass through much significant early Phyi Dar history (for example, bypassing the Sa Skya period) to the figure of Ta'i Si-tu Byang-chub Rgyal-mtshan (1302–1364), the first Sde Srid of the Phag-mo Gru hierarchy and one of the most significant political figures in Tibet between the Imperial period and the formation of the Dga'-ldan Pho-brang. As with many later political traditions, he used official terms from the Imperium, such as *nang gi blon chen*. He also maintained power through a traditional system of oathing and continued a comitatus in a Buddhist environment. Looking at his polity helps us understand how monks, monasteries, and their power structures related to each other by following models inherited from the Imperial period.

mna' skyel is the most common phrase for oath-taking used by Byang-chub Rgyal-mtshan and other later writers (it does not seem to be found in Imperial-period sources) and is often mentioned in his political memoirs. In general, this system of oathing is distinguished by swearing on the Triratna through its agents, Buddhist spiritual beings (*Ḍākinī*s), rather than on family ancestral beings (*lha*).[17] These oathings involved monks, lamas, and their clan relations from groups such as

the Tshal-pa and the 'Bri-gung-pa, members of the post-Imperial nobility. Usually only high-ranking individuals were involved. This shows that oathing functioned as it had earlier: Find the leader of a group, bind him by oath, and his "retinue"—perhaps already similarly bound to him—will follow. [One example at: BKA' CHEMS.169] In most of these cases, the retinue (BKA' CHEMS.292: *mna' bskor*) was a group of monks connected by Buddhist oaths to their lamas and abbots. We also encounter in Ta'i Si-tu's writings perhaps the first Phyi Dar reference to the creation of lists of those equivalent to comitatus members, a *mna' tho* or *mna' yig*, at BKA' CHEMS.131 and .246. In the latter, those who adhered to it were enrolled in a *gang gsung sgrub pa'i mna' yig*, a list of those who carried out whatever was spoken (in the oath); cf. the similar phrase *gang gsung sgrub pa'i mna' dam bzhag mna' pa dgu skor* at BKA' CHEMS.228. One can even find here an abbreviated version of a political oath, rare in Phyi Dar literature.[18]

Byang-chub Rgyal-mtshan did not discuss the ritual dimension of oathings. We learn more about this from two other sources. First, again, is the redoubtable historian Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag (1504–1566), in whose work we find ritual details that seem to relate *lha* and mountains. They help us understand that, if not certifiably from the Imperial period, from some early time a religious context was expressed in this way:

The law (*khrims*) in cases of rape involved: *brdzun spong ba'i khrims lha srung dpang du byas nas mna' spob pa*…, "The law for renouncing lying [when being accused of rape is], braving a pledge after making [ones] protective *lha* a witness…" [DPA'-BO.1985.192] This brings us to another important use of oathing, one which is perhaps as ancient as its political application: Determining the guilt or innocence of an accused through an ordeal, such as picking by hand the correct stone from a tub of hot oil.[19] Ordeals remained an important method for determining truth in speech until modern times. Oaths have thus been central to both political and legal life in Tibet, and religious belief was central to both through invoking a *lha*. (If we combine this with the rich material on the casting of dice to determine court decisions, we see more clearly the role of the irrational, so to speak, in politics and government administration throughout the history of Tibet.)

Calling a *lha* to be a witness in an oath is widely reported in historical sources. It goes back to the Imperium, and its citations in inscriptions help us understand the transition to Buddhist values at courts, and how they affected oathing.[20] As given above, the expectation would have been that, as with the treaty rites, those not speaking the truth after taking

an oath and invoking a *lha* would be punished. The early rites speak of oath-breakers being ripped apart in the same way as sacrificed animals. The question becomes, which *lha* were invoked? It would seem logical that it was a *yul lha* (= *lha srung*), since they were connected with both the clan and the birth-place of one swearing an oath. This put even more responsibility for those invoking them to speak honestly, since the *yul lha*, if offended by an oath-breaker invoking his name, would also punish his family and clan.[21]

In Chapter One, n. 61, we cited an early narrative, from the *Chronicle*, on the oath and its role in the creation of a clan confederation. The most problematic element there is the word *re*. We need to address this point further because it relates to the religious dimensions of oathing. Recapitulating the comments there, the first use of *re* could support a vocative or emphatic use of a nominal. However, its second use (*gzhan sus bslus kyang nyan re bar bro stsol to*) certainly points toward a verbal in an "infinitive" construction, perhaps with an adverbial function. Therefore, we assume, for the sake of argument, that it is a verbal expression in origin and usage.

To this early citation we may add these occurences at the end of the (full) text of the Skar Chung inscription reported in DPA'-BO.1985.410–411 in these phrases: "…*yab kyi ring la dbu snyung gtsigs mdzad pa' rnams dang / nga'i thugs la dgongs te / gtsigs gser du bsnan nas / yi ge 'di las byung ba'i rnams / nam zhar 'di bzhin du myi mdzad re*", and "*thugs dam dang dbu' snyung bzhes te gtsigs su mdzad pas / chos mdzad pa 'di gces spras ci la yang sdig go zhes nam / ma legs so zhes mo dang rmis ltas las sogs te ci'i phyir yang rung ste / Dkond cog gsum gzhig re spang re*", and "…*pho brang na Dkond cog gsum gyi rten btsugs cing / mchod pa yang gud du spang zhing bskar re / mchod gnas su myi bya re*" (In the first lines we find the btsan-po, Sad-na Legs, referring to those who swore oaths as they participated in creating the Bsam-yas inscription during the reign of his father. The third extract consists of pledges of the Sangha to the btsan po regarding Buddhist practice.)

re was apparently always used in the sense of a double negative, both with verbs that have negative sense and with negated verbs that have positive sense (DPA'-BO.1985.410:…*de skad ces che chung su gsold kyis kyang de ltar mdzad re*). Another, longer oath in the *Chronicle* occurs just prior to that cited in n. 61, and in this oath I think we can finally see how *re* should be interpreted (if not grammatically quite well understood): *bro stsal pa 'ï tshig nï / deng phan chad / Zing-po*

Rje rgyab du myï dor re / Spu Rgyal pang du myï len re / Btsan-po Spu Rgyal la glo ba 'drïng re / mthang grang re / man ngag thub par myi 'tshal re / man ngag thub par myi 'tshal re / pyï ma nang 'tshal re / som nyi bgyïd re // brdul phod par myï 'tshal re // srog spongs 'tshal re // Btsan-po Slon Btsan gyis // bka' jï stsald pa... [PT1287.174–177; cf. DTH.105 and 137f, text and translation]. Taking the first two passages as examples, they are clear in their use: "From now on, never do not turn your back on Zing-po Rje; never do not take the Spu Rgyal for a witness (in your oaths)". I.e., *always* leave Zing-po Rje behind you, and *always* take the Spu Rgyal as witness.

A survey of lexicons and early literature does not help us understand the early use of *re*. Modern concepts such as "hope" or "wish", or the verbal *re ba*, "to be worth" (in Goldstein) are attractive, but lack the power necessary for these expressions. However, considering *re* = *re skan*, "never", as asserted in DTH, also presents problems on the grounds of word-order: adverbials do not follow verbs in Tibetan. (Of course, anything can happen in verse, but not all such oathing statements are in verse.)

There are problems with all proposed interpretations of this final *re*. One common element in these analyses is that they rest on phrases or occurrences in classical written Tibetan sources which are assumed, but not shown to be, the same use that *re* was put to in the inscriptions and the *Chronicle*.[22] In fact, we simply do not understand the Old Tibetan language well enough yet to accept such assumptions. However, the occurrences of *re bar* cited here clearly support interpreting it as a verb meaning "not to exist" as used in set expressions in the imperative or subjunctive mode as "may it not/never", as stated in Chapter One, n. 61.

Thus, the intuition voiced in DTH remains persuasive *faute de mieux*. It is only by not rejecting the interpretation of *re* as a negative that the passages containing it are not misinterpreted as positive injunctions to do the opposite of what the texts intend. So, we continue here to accept *re* as intending an emphatic "never", but based on a verb with this meaning.

ri is used in a very similar way in later oaths. As with *re*, in these phrases *ri* is a final emphatic with no clear syntactic connection to the final verb. Therefore, we must inquire as to whether there is a relationship between these terms, and how *ri* functions in oathing.

In the *She bam chen mo'i dper brjod*, a work which in part details disputes between monks and their resolution, we encounter the

following passage:...*yid dam Rdo-rje 'Jigs-byed*...*Bstan Srung Dmag Zor Rgyal-mo Gnas Chung Chos-kyi Rgyal-po / rang rang la 'go ba'i* <u>*Lha Srung Gnyan-po*</u> *rnams dpang du bzhugs su gsol*...*lcags ldag pa'i ri tshig gtsang ma phul ba*...(p. 119; cf. p. 117 also). This mixture of older phraseologies (spirits which are *gnyan po*) with Phyi Dar ideas (*'go ba'i lha srung*) in connection with a pure "mountain vow" (*ri tshig gtsang ma*; on *lcags ldag pa*, see n. 23) is an illustration of the complicated picture of oathing in Phyi Dar Tibet. We have already seen that there was a separate, older Buddhist oathing, evidenced in the Imperial inscriptions in the phrase *yi dam bca'o*, which was used in apposition to other oathing methods (see the example in n. 20). These parallel sets of practices seem to have coexisted through much of post-Imperial politics and religion, so this *she bam* (official government documents) collection only naturally shows some (apparently) non-Buddhist expressions of oathing, including calling on a *lha* as witness, embedded within a Buddhist mandalaic and cosmological system. (Of course, there really is no conflict, since the witnessing powers exist in a complementary relationship.)

The principal question remains, however. Since we know that *re* was the original term, we must decide whether the later *ri* represented an alternative system that referenced mountains, or was, as seems more likely, simply the result of an orthographic variant—perhaps based on a non-standard pronunciation—which by happy coincidence sounded like the word for mountain, thus triggering a role for them in oathing which did not previously exist. (Needless to say, this is also an important element in analyzing the nature of an ancient 'mountain cult'.) This would have led to extended expressions such as *ri tshig*, a variety of, or reformulation of, the "truth statement" or *bden tshig*. However, we still occcasionally find oathing statements that make it difficult to understand how any noun, 'mountain' or otherwise, could function in its position. See, for example, these truth statements: *nged tsha ba khams tshan la grub rgya ba dpon g.yog gi 'grul pa dang gra rgyun yong bzhin pa min* <u>*ri*</u> */ Stod Bla Zur Bkra-shis Rgya-mtsho Sog Yul nas 'khor bar Kong-po khams tshan gyi ham pa byas rtsod min* <u>*ri*</u>...(*ibid.* 118)[23]

The obvious way to explain this development of *ri* is by returning to the basic element of Tibetan oathing, the spiritual being which is invoked as witness. Since some connection was already seen between *lha* and mountains as their point of orientation, it would have been simple to see *ri* as an ellipsis for their presence, i.e., as the home of the *lha yul* or *lha srung*, i.e., the *gzhi bdag* who were the clan/area

guardians. *ri* and *ri tshig* do not have these functions outside of oathing formulae, however, e.g., in *lha bsangs* and other ritual texts which often refer to, or invoke, mountains.[24] That no other formulaic use of *ri* is found is further evidence that it is a substitute for *re*. However, within later examples of oathing formulae it has been assumed that *ri* does refer to mountains, and we have at least one example of the use of both terms in a single document from the seventeenth century to that effect, i.e.,… *don 'gangs dang mtshungs pa'i bkru dgag re dgos par ri tshig lha dpang gi gsham du phan tshun so so'i don skor la gzhi lhas ga slog gi tshig la mang nyung ma shor ba* (Sangs-rgyas Rgya-mtsho, *Blang dor gsal bar ston pa'i drang thig Dwangs shel me long nyer gcig pa* as published in the *Snga rabs Bod kyi srid khrims*. Be-cin: Mi-rigs Dpe-skrun-khang, 2004, p. 268f).

The conclusion: The similarity in pronunciation, writing, and usage of *ri* and *re* strongly suggests that mountains were not originally a reference in oathings. One cannot find evidence connecting mountains and oathing even in early Phyi Dar materials. This is an association which arose from misinterpreting the asseverative verbal *re*.

Because taking oaths in the post-Imperial period continued to have a religious dimension, there were serious negative consequences to breaking them. These could (at least under some circumstances) be offset by rituals. The Fifth Dalai Lama reports a *dam za rim gro* (GTAM PHUD. II.112.4), an rite to repair a broken oath. *dam za* is a variation of a phrase rendered in Jäschke as "to swear falsely; to commit perjury", literally, "to eat an oath": *mna' za ba*. This recalls the ancient phrase *gdon mi za ba*, "may I not eat a *gdon* (which would cause me to be untrue/unreliable)." Also, in the *Bka' gsaṅ zab chos mkha' khyab raṅ grol las, skad cig gcig gis rdzogs* there is a brief text, the *Sangs-rgyas pa'i myur lam Sangs-rgyas kyi mtshan brjod Nges ltung drung nas 'byin pa*. It is a *sdig bshags* by Karma Chags-med (17th century). It provides a *dhāraṇī* for avoiding the pernicious affects of breaking an oath. The gravity of this offense can be estimated in that this *dhāraṇī* immediately follows those meant to exculpate for the killing of a person and the killing of a horse.

Finally, we come full-circle by noting how oathing has continued to the present time to be the glue by which Tibetan governments have functioned. In the Dga'-ldan Pho-brang fealty was guaranteed among those serving the Dalai Lamas by a Buddhist variation of the comitatus which was unlike the system used by Ta'i Si-tu. (However, it is

reminiscent of the ancient Buddhist parallel system of oathing mentioned in the inscriptions, *yi dam bca'o*, which dovetailed so nicely with that used at the court. One was based on the *lha* of the nobility which involved them as witnesses, the other on control of deities by Tantric practitioners, which controlled them by integrating them into a fixed and relatively subservient position in Buddhist cosmology.)

The Fifth Dalai Lama was able, by means of *dbang bskur* and *rje gnang* (a grant or conferral), to create a circle of subjects dependent upon him for the reward of political service, i.e., a comitatus. Two examples are found in his biography: *dpon blon la tshe rta zung 'brel dang drung 'khor nang zan dmangs bcas la tshe dbang zhig bskur* and... *Skyid Grong 'Phag-pa'i sku gnyer / mchod dpon pa / dge slong / dpal grong pa / 'jam bstan / rnam pa.n / 'dar pa rje drung sogs drung 'khor rags bsdus brgya skor la Jo lugs kyi Sgrol-ma ngyer gcig gi rjes gnang*. (In Ngag-dbang Blo Bzang Rgya-mtsho, *Za-hor gyi bande... Du kū la'i gos bzang*. Lha-sa: Bod Ljongs Mi-dmangs Dpe-skrun-khang, 1991; the first passage is from vol. 1, p. 328; the second, from vol. 3, p. 270.) We can see here that he created fealty by taking the life-power (*tshe dbang*) and access to important spiritual beings (Tārā) of those surrounding him into his control. He created a group that was as dependent upon him for their ultimate fate—in a Buddhist context—as the original comitatus was upon Gnam Ri Slon Mtshan for theirs.

One of the first set of acts of the Fifth Dalai Lama as a form of Avalokiteśvara was to apply oathing as a means of gradually accruing power. Both in service to Gushri Khan and the Chinese court [ISHIHAMA.49], as well as to common and noble Tibetans, he presented himself as an incarnation of that Bodhisattva. Also, presenting himself to be an incarnation of Srong Btsan Sgam-po, he placed himself, as head of Tibet, to be the leader of the comitatus form of government of the btsan-po, continued by other means [ISHIHAMA.44f]: Whereas the btsan-pos were supported by the *lha* of their ancestors who also became Bodhisattvas and *deva*s under the influence of Buddhism at court, the Dalai Lamas were supported by a *lha* who was also a Bodhisattva, Avalokiteśvara. There is little substantial difference between these systems, given that *lha* have always had a leading political role in Tibetan culture.

As at other courts, during the Imperium there were important subsidiary rites dealing with the oathing and binding of its members. The most prominent among these is another important element of the Central

Eurasian Culture Complex, the "cup rite". It is also an important rite considered by itself because it is a link in the chain of the use of oaths established above, oathing → ordeals → speaking truthfully.

This set of court customs was at the heart of the comitatus and court system, surviving into Western European Medieval literature and legend as well as in historical documents. The most important work on this rite is Emil Esin, "The cup rites in Central Eurasian and Turkish art", and it has become a standard work because its author was aware of the broader cultural significance of the subject. To cite only one passage, "Like the Sino-'Barbarian' and Central [Asian] shepherd kings, the Oğuz monarchs held meat and cup rites which underlined the communion of the heroes when undertaking the obligations of suzerainty and fealty. The vassals aligned themselves in hierarchic order around the Oğuz king…As in the case of the Scythians, only the Oğuz warrior who [had] shed blood could take rank in this ceremony." [ESIN.241f] In addition to such elements being shared among many courts from early times, influences from Asia can be seen in developments in Medieval Europe.[25] One early passage attesting such a rite at the Tibetan Imperial court is found in the *Chronicle* (DTH.107 (text) and 140 (translation)): *btsan po rjes 'bangs dgyes skyems ston mo gsol lo*, "Puis le seignuer roi et les sujets firent un joyeux festin à libations". The fall of Dwags-po was the immediate cause for this celebration, an appropriate time to observe the division of spoils among the btsan-po's comitatus and to occasion further pledges of loyalty among its members. The Mongols observed similar feasts on such occasions along with divisions among the leadership and outstanding warriors. A good example of part of such a rite-complex at the court of Qubilai is given by Marco Polo (*The travels of Marco Polo: the complete Yule-Cordier edition*, v. 1, p. 383: "And when the Emperor is going to drink, all the musical instruments…begin to play. And when he takes the cup all the Barons and the rest of the company drop on their knees and make the deepest obeisance before him, and then the Emperor doth drink. But each time that he does so the whole ceremony is repeated."

The *Sba bzhed* makes reference to a tradition surrounding rites at Bsam-yas attended by the nobility. These included the inauguration of novices in a *pravrajyā* rite. A court was set up there. Gold and silver vessels containing hot water and rice and barley beer were passed around; at just that time they cast "dice edicts" (*bka' sho*) and made other legal decisions, such as the retraction of the mutilation of commoners which had been part of Tibet's system of punishment [cf. JTS.2; XTS.80] and

having the nobles at Bsam-yas agree to this and swear (*'bro bor te mna' bskyal ba*) to support Buddhism and, essentially, become Buddhists themselves.[26] If this is an accurate description, this tradition combines neatly the convening of a court within a Buddhist environment with a "cup rite" to solemnize it. In fact, ESIN.226 notes that similar cup rites were performed from the Indus to China in early times to celebrate *investitures* and competitions. The inauguration of monks in the presence of a court makes sense in two ways. One is that in ancient India this change of life-status had to be legally acknowledged by courts.[27] Such was necessary, or mendicants, monks, yogis, etc., would face travel and life-style restrictions that, essentially, would have denied them their religious practice. Monks at Tibetan courts would have realized this. The second is that, as with the manner in which De-ga G.yu Tshal Monastery was used by Ral-pa-can, the monks were members of the nobility, and thus had relatives at the court. This initiation of monks at Bsam-yas certainly also received the public approval of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, who could only have gone there with his court, since, wherever a btsan-po went, that was where his *pho brang* or court was. (We need to keep this is mind when considering the political dimensions of Bsam-yas.)

These details help us understand the role of this rite in actions at Tibetan courts. The connection with the casting of dice is interesting, but in the following we see what was probably the most important function of the cup rite, i.e., oathing. The Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) reports in his history:[28]

> *Kong Jo yid ma rangs par Bod kyi sa dpyad bzang ba 'ga' zhig nyams su bcug / mi ring bar sras zhabs 'dzugs kyi dga' ston la btsun mo gnyis kyi pha ming dang blon 'bangs rnams 'tshogs pa'i dbus su / rgyal pos 'bras chang gis bkang ba'i gser gyi phor pa sras kyi lag tu gtad /*
> *snod gser skyogs chang gis gang ba 'di /*
> *bu khyod rang gi zhang po'i lag tu thod /*
> *ma gang yin gyi yid ches de la byed /*
> *gsungs pas /*
> *sras kyis rin po che'i phor pa*
> *Rgya rnams kyi lag tu gtad nas /*
> *nga Khri Srong Lde Btsan Rgya tsha yin /*
> *Rnam Snang gang gi don mi 'tshal* (on this line, see note 28) /
> *gsungs pa dang /*
> *Kong Jo yid rab tu dga' ste /*
> *tshe sngon ma'i las kyi 'phen pa yis /*
> *nga Rgya nas 'ong ba'i bu mo la /*
> *rje 'gran med rgyal po'i sras shig 'khrungs /*

This is the famous motif wherein Mes Ag Tshoms gives a truth-oath, via a cup rite, to determine which queen was the mother of his son, Kong Jo or Sna Nam Bza'/Rnam Snang Bza' [Sna Nam Za' Mang-po Rje Bzhi Steng].[29] This ritualized court song actually records an event which never happened. Princess Kong Jo and the crown prince memorialized here both died before Khri Srong Lde Brtsan was born. Nevertheless, as with many events in the *Chronicle*, the scene set here is not only plausible, but most likely represents the memory of earlier Tibetan court realities. We observe two salient features. One, this cup rite takes place during the *zhabs 'dzugs*, another rite, one celebrating the first step of a royal infant. (That the same phrasing is used when Gnam Ri Slon Mtshan "sets his feet" to attack after forming his comitatus is not coincidental.) This shows the practicality that a truth ritual, a cup rite with an oath, had as a formal act at court, where queens and advisors could each question what the other was doing, and could even involve the btsan-po. The second point is the procession of the cup rite. Mes Ag Tshoms offers a gold goblet[30] into the hands of his son, who (in this dramatic narrative) makes what amounts to an oracular statement. We may see this as a variation on a scene, re-arranged to the greater glory of Khri Srong Lde Brstan, but which very likely reflected how the passing of a drinking vessel signified that a choice had been determined. When Khri Srong Lde Brtsan passed it on to the Chinese, it was symbolic that all who accepted it—drank from it—accepted the truth-value of the statements made. Loyalty to the btsan-po was maintained through such assertions. [ESIN.239f] In this fictitious narrative, not only did this decision make Kong Jo happy, it also sealed the question for the court. For succession and court stability, the cup rite was an important method by which btsan-pos maintained their right of rule as leader of their comitatus and arbiter of power at the court.

We speculated in Chapter One that the complete oathing and comitatus complex may not have survived until the end of the Imperium. By now it should be clear that the acceptance of Buddhism at court, especially (or perhaps only) at the court of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, could have been intended to weaken this mechanism. Sanghas had the advantage of giving the btsan-pos unconditional support, an independent power base, so to speak. Clans that were antithetical to Buddhism would not have appreciated the Sangha having a significant place at his court, yet they had few alternatives as long as the btsan-po continued to be an effective leader. Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's reign seems the high point of

alienation, in which the power structure at court had been re-arranged to include Buddhist forms of oathing, as evidenced by the inscriptions from his reign. All these moves may have been motivated by questions about that btsan-po's legitimacy. It is likely that some clan leaders questioned entering a traditional oathing and comitatus system with him if they were not confident that the ancestral *lha* of the imperial line would support him. Other clans were certainly more accepting of his legitimacy. Therefore, it was quite politic of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan to create an alternative power-base. (Below and in the next chapter, we will discuss the political dimensions of rituals at Bsam-yas which fit this situation.)

In evaluating this troubled relationship, even something only briefly noted, and therefore perhaps not taken to be of much import, could be significant. It is recorded that Khri Srong Lde Brtsan prohibited the sacrifice of horses. [SBA BZHED.1961.28; SBA BZHED.1982.34] If he did so, his motivation would seem to have been to enact Buddhist principles. However, he must have realized that he was also radically altering the major, three-year oaths as well as the burial rites for btsan-pos, both of which required the sacrifice of horses. Again, it seems that he was not averse to moving outside the traditional oathing and rite system, perhaps to a degree beyond that of his successors. He knew that he could not depend unconditionally on clan leaders who believed in the old oathing system which had held the tribal confederations together, so he felt free to deprive it of elements which conflicted with his new faith. And, of course, those clan leaders who supported Buddhism would have remained loyal to him. On the other hand, he did not surrender the essence of his rule—the unique status of the btsan-po as a superior being, and even as a military leader—which is clear from the political documents of both his reign and those of his successors, Sad-na Legs and Ral-pa-can, who also balanced their nature as rulers with their support of Buddhism quite successfully.

Rites dealing with the founding of Bsam-yas

We know something about rites for the consecration of Buddhist images, although the *Sba bzhed* traditions also contain what we must at least provisionally consider "non-normative" rites, if only because they represent traditions apparently not found in Bstan 'gyur documents and other later sources that have been studied.[31] However, we know very little about what rites were performed at the construction of monasteries and temples.

Even founding a modest temple was not a simple matter for a btsan-po, as we have maintained above (Chapter One, note 4), because of the risks posed to balances and alliances at the court, let alone the building of a monastic complex. The founding of Bsam-yas is the most-described example we have of such an effort, beginning with the inscription which remains today, in both stone and longer scroll versions, as well as much later traditions in the *Sba bzhed* and other Phyi Dar sources. Nevertheless, studies of special topics relating to its construction and function have rarely been undertaken. This especially applies to how its construction affected the relationship between Khri Srong and the nobility around him, which remains a nearly unstudied topic.[32]

It stands to reason that founding ceremonies would include local variations and specialized versions of rites routinely performed by Sanghas. Among the former, we have anecdotal materials about the use of geomantic methods (*sa dpyad*) for the location of Bsam-yas, not the earliest, but the most famous early Tibetan monastery. Other details about its founding, and Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's role in it, include a unique and unusual narrative from early Phyi Dar materials.

In a note to an earlier work, I made a brief reference[33] to the rite (*cho ga*) wherein Khri Srong Lde Brtsan circumscribed the foundation of that monastery: "First, there was a geomantic examination (*sa dpyad*) of the area. Then, using an implement of gold (a hatchet or adze; *'jor* is one term used), Khri Srong alone, or, Khri Srong with his children, or even with a group of aristocratic (*ya rabs*) children, etc. (*bu tsha pha ma mes phyi tshang ba*), all of whom wore ornaments, and with Khri Srong wearing a white silk garment, actually scratched the outline of Bsam-yas."

Our confidence that something like this really happened is bolstered by an interesting source from another area of the Buddhist world. In "Ploughing as a ritual of royal consecration", by S. Paranavitana, we find a key to understanding both the Buddhist background of this rite and its immediate political usefulness to Khri Srong Lde Brtsan. Briefly presented—more context will be given for this rite in the section on Cakravartins in the next chapter—it is attested in the *Dīpavaṃsa* and the *Mahāvaṃsa*. The rite unites ancient Indic conceptions of the ruler as both defender and instrument of fertility. According to these narratives, Devānāmpiyatissa is guided by monks newly arrived from India—as Khri Srong Lde Brtsan was guided by Śāntarakṣita in the *Sba bzhed* version—to take part in a consecration rite. (That these

monks came from India helps explain how the rite was transmitted to Tibet. Newaris may have been the intermediaries.) He is instructed to inscribe a furrow around his capital city with a golden plough or adze. This he does, accompanied by members of his court and family. The central theme of this monk-driven story is that all power and legitimacy of a ruler depended upon the king establishing a secure area for his Sangha within this circle. Thus, whether his ritual action describes a city or a monastery is not the central point of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's behavior.[34] Both these narratives picture the value of the rite in the same way: First, the ruler must provide security for his Sangha. If that is done, his Sangha is in a secure position to protect and support him. This becomes, in turn, a method for him to protect and support his realm, and he will be charged with the powers needed to do that. (One of the ways he can maintain these powers, even when having to violate central Buddhist commandments, such as to not take human life, is by the Sangha offering him exoneration through confession rites, the next set of court rituals to be considered here.) Given the questions about Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's legitimacy, he had an excellent motive for constructing Bsam-yas and performing this rite.

"Ploughing as a ritual of royal consecration" provides a clear link between the *Sba bzhed* rite and those performed at (at least some) courts served by Theravāda monks. These rites were thus, as such often are, based on normative Buddhist practices.[35]

The pedigree of this ritual actually takes us back much further in history and place. In fact, it is an example of a CECC rite. Its reflex in Roman political ritual goes back to the founding of that most sacred Western city, and is rooted in its central mythological narrative. To quote the Loeb Classical Library edition of Plutarch's *Lives*, vol. 1, on Romulus, p. 119f:

> Romulus buried Remus [whom he had killed in a quarrel about building Rome, while Romulus was digging a trench for the city wall]...and then set himself to building the city...A circular trench was dug around what is now the Comitium, and in this were deposited first-fruits of all things the use of which was sanctioned by custom as good and by nature as necessary; and finally, every man brought a small portion of the soil of his native land, and these were cast in among the first-fruits and mingled with them. They call this trench, as they do the heavens, by the name of 'mundus'. And the founder, having shod a plough with a brazen ploughshare, and having yoked to it a bull and a cow, himself drove a deep furrow round the boundary lines, while those who followed after him had

> to turn the clods, which the plough threw up, inwards towards the city, and suffer no clod to lie turned outwards. With this line they mark out the course of the wall, and it is called, by contraction, 'pomerium', that is, 'post murum', *behind* or *next the wall*. And where they purposed to put in a gate, there they took the share out of the ground, lifted the plough over, and left a vacant space. And this is the reason why they regard all the walls as sacred except the gates; but if they held the gates sacred, it would not be possible, without religious scruples, to bring into and send out of the city things which are necessary, and yet unclean.

In other words, this Buddhist tradition is a continuation of an ancient (common?) Indo-European city-founding rite. The establishment of cities and temples involved four rituals, according to the Romans: *inauguratio* (divination to determine the site of the town), *orientatio, limitatio*, and *consecratio* (recognition of the town's patron god). At least some of these stages are described for the founding of Bsam-yas, including the initial stage of using divinatory techniques (*sa dpyad*) to determine its location. How similar these rites may have been in detail is difficult to determine because neither the *Sba bzhed*, nor perhaps any Buddhist source, describes the entire ritual complex performed at Bsam-yas. Although this particular example shows Buddhists having adapted a pre-existing ritual structure as a basis for their foundation rite, the religio-political connection here also is important. In both cultures, the ploughing rite (Skt. *karṣanavidhi*) has application to the consecration of rule and the definition of a sacred, defined space. It is interesting to consider that, in view of these rites, the Buddha's presence in monasteries is, functionally, highly analogous to that of Jupiter's in the sacred precincts of Rome. Both exist in the role of benevolent spiritual protectors to whom their human populations are dedicated.

It has long been acknowledged that the Buddha was considered to be present in monasteries, protecting them. The cultural background of the above rite is the founding of a sacred area in Tibet for the purpose of a covenant between a ruler, protector of his people, and the representatives of the Buddha, protector of that protector and of his people.[36]

Confession rites

The court religious practice of Buddhists for which we have the most internally consistent description over a period of time is the confession rite. Both Imperial and Phyi Dar confession rites contain elements

which show that the Sanghas and the btsan-pos used them to support their leaderships, just as such rites were used to support the nobility among the Uyghurs and Chinese. They are, thus, the best direct, ritual evidence we have of the symbiotic relationship between Sanghas and courts. And, unlike many of the rites described in the *Sba bzhed* traditions, we have textual evidence for confession rites in both Imperial period as well as Phyi Dar documents.

PT016 is perhaps the most significant Old Tibetan document for the place of Buddhism at a court. It is from the Imperial period, and is the earliest document we have in which a confession rite is recorded. At PT016.24v2ff there is a recitation[37] in which Ral-pa-can, ministers, and their entourages confess (*'thol lo bshags so*) all the sinful actions which have been performed by them and other sentient beings which deviate from the Dharma and the Vinaya. However, there is usually a *quid pro quo* inherent in court rites. In this case, there is the reciprocation of a gift to the Triratna (i.e., the building of the Dge-ga G.yu Tshal monastery, described immediately preceding this confession rite), and that is, that this ritual service by the Sangha serves to strengthen the *chab srid*. Ral-pa-can performs a rite which combines an offering with a confession (*mchod cing gsol lo rim gro bgyi'o* at 24v1) by which he literally offers a part of the Imperium. However, he is then reconfirmed in his office—with the strengthening of the Imperium—through the acceptance of this gift and his confession, which is noted by his (25v4–25r1) *dbu rmog brtsan pa'i chab srid* becoming even greater in its glory (*byin du che ba*).

Loss of the figure of the btsan-po, as in so many other cases, had a profound affect on the procession of these important rites. Rituals in which the Sangha acted as intermediaries for the confessions of the btsan-pos are notably absent in the *Sba bzhed* traditions. (This indicates either that the Sba family did not perform such rites, or that they were not considered necessary to archive.) We get an idea about how the context of confession changed by looking at how it is presented in later sources. In one of the most significant political works of the early Phyi Dar, the *Bu chos*, we find passages showing how the dynamic had changed, how rulers (who have now become stereotypical figures embedded in Jātaka-like narratives) had to depend upon spiritual beings manifest as human beings, or their helpers, to determine the nature of their transgression and to act as the necessary intermediary for confession.[38] One could read a variety of messages into this, but one conclusion is clear: Confession without the leadership of a btsan-po

and a complex government hierarchy would not be the formal process depicted in PT016, with its assumed balance of power. (On this see my "The persistence of ritual…", p. 182.) Shortly after this, the *bla ma* emerges in most Gsar-ma literature as an indispensible agent at court. Without him the confession of a rgyal-po, etc., becomes impossible, because rulers cannot comprehend the bases of their errors. This is why the model of the confession given at BU CHOS.114f reads, in content and style, very similar to the ritual at PT016. All that needed to be accomplished was inverting the power structure.

To show how profound this change was, even in the *Byang gter* rituals of Rgod-kyi Ldem-'phru-can (1337–1409), one of the most significant Rnying-ma *gter ston*, the *bla ma* had virtually the same role in confession, even though bla mas often did not have the important position in early Rnying-ma teachings that they had in Bka' Gdams-pa teachings.[39] This is a clear proof about how, without a central leadership, no *quid pro quo* was necessary and the forms of these rites, which became the sole prerogative of Gsar-ma religious teachers, grew to have great influence throughout Tibet.[40]

The Bon tradition

We conclude this chapter not by a description of rites, but by a critique of descriptions of them. It has been so long and consistently maintained by the Bon tradition (and others) that their ancestors had responsibility for the rituals of the btsan-pos that it really is often taken for granted.[41] Rather than supporting or denying this assertion, let us draw a conclusion about its probability based on a critique of the earliest documents used to support this viewpoint.

Let us first of all point out that, to identify a phenomenon through inference or indirect evidence, we must have a sufficient definition of its nature. The noun "Bon" is not found in any document which meets the standards set forth at the beginning of this work as having been composed during the Imperium. It is not referred to in the inscriptions or the *Annals*; in the *Chronicle* it occurs as a verb, twice in the phrase *gzus nï lha bon to*, which means, "The mediator called to a *lha*," as at PT1287: *Slon Mtshan Slon Kol / gzus ni lha bon to*; this statement was made by a witness. There is no question of "the Bon" being involved in the narrative. In the variety of texts in which the word or syllable *bon* appears, there are also many cases in which its meaning is not

clear. In fact, there is no consistent use of the term which allows us to trace it back, either philologically or as a religious term. We cannot with certainty relate the abstract noun *bon* with verbs of the same spelling. By extrapolation, and according to its earliest texts, the term is limited in reference to a ritual method; even today, Bon is most clearly distinguished by some details of practice, not doctrine. Until now, no comprehensive survey of the occurrences of *bon* and words perhaps related to it in the Dunhuang documents has been undertaken. It goes without saying, then, that no persuasive etymology for the term has been given, nor any ancient context for it found.[42] Because we can see that the term, at least functionally, refers to a sort of ritual procedure, it presents itself as a close equivalent of *chos* as used in very early sources, such as by Khri Srong Lde Brtsan (cited in Chapter One, n. 84). It is as if *chos* were the term from one language for the ritually correct way to do something, and *bon* the same from another.[43]

Considering the above remarks, we now must spend some time analyzing a few Dunhuang documents which earlier scholarship has used to assert the presence of Bon-pos at the imperial courts.

The first significant study to link the role of Bon-pos to the burial rites of the btsan-pos was Marcelle Lalou's study of PT1042, "Rituel bon-po des funérailles royales".[44] Does the material studied here agree with other Dunhuang texts and contain authentically ancient vocabulary and concepts? Yes. The only problem is, judging by the facsimiles at the end of the Lalou article, this unique manuscript text itself is not only most probably not from the Imperial period, it seems barely to be what could be considered Old Tibetan. There is also the matter of the author/copyist (*bris*), Sngom Dge Dpal. Not only is he not a Bon-po, his name (*Śubhaśrî) reveals that he was most likely a monk, and may even be the Buddhist credited with several translations in the Kanjur, according to the catalog published by D.T. Suzuki.[45] Since many translators lived long after the Imperium, this does not support the notion that we are dealing with an ancient document. In other words, however interesting and detailed (perhaps a bit *too* detailed, since nothing like it has survived elsewhere, including in the later Bon tradition) this work is, it has no clear, direct relationship to the Imperium. It also contains many prescriptive verses; these give it an abstract quality which fits more a *précis* or model than a practical handbook. This structure also contrasts with the authentic Imperial ritual documents we have, such as PT016.

Indeed, for all we know, Dge Dpal was simply reporting either 1) Tradition he had learned in detail from Buddhists or others, and recorded; or, 2) Tradition he learned from Bon-pos about what they claimed they had done during the Imperial period. It might even represent some truly ancient tradition, accurately reflecting events, except that Bon-pos inserted themselves to convince others of their role in the Imperium. Its form makes it an excellent example of the explosion of documents early in post-Imperial Tibet in which various claims of service and practices are connected with the Imperium. Principally because the manuscript is not from the Imperial period, any claims that could be made about it representing ancient traditions must be viewed skeptically.

However, if we judge it by some of the motifs it contains, we find elements that could lead us to believe this ritual was at home at the courts of the Imperium. In several details, it agrees with CECC internment rituals of the Scythians, imperial Tibetans and others. There is an offering of what has been considered an element of the btsan-po's armor, or a helmet—the latter not likely, given the number of well-attested terms for it—very early in the rite (l. 13, the term in question *ljags byang*). Horses are prominent, both as members of the ritual entourage (cf. the *rta do ma* at l. 15, et al.) and, more importantly, as sacrificial offerings. (On which see above. Horses are symbolically important. Along with the burial carts of the Scythians, which carried the bodies of the dead kings around their kingdom, the presence of horses is most revealing of the status of leadership among the comitatus of the ruler. The horse is also, by itself, representative of a militarily important resource. We also know that both carts and horses were used in Tibetan burial rites for btsan-pos.) The presence of armed soldiers at stages in the rite emphasize the btsan-po as military/comitatus leader. These points aside, this text also contains some details which are not similar to known burial rites for btsan-pos or customs of other CECC peoples.[46]

When considering their evidentiary value, we must take into account that some such traditions survived the fall of the Imperium (e.g., data in the *Sba bzhed*), and Bon-pos could easily have claimed them, simply because Chos-pa traditions had no place for them in their reconstruction of Tibet's religious culture. Monks, after all, had quickly become fixated upon showing how devoutly Buddhist the btsan-pos were. However, there would have been many reasons for the Bon tradition, at that time, to have created just such a work to establish their *bona fides*, whether or not the text contained ancient court traditions they participated in.

What were discredited institutions to one tradition may have become a basis for legitimacy for another.

When all is said and done, the orthography and language of PT1042 are the most serious criticisms of the assertion that it is an accurate guide for representing events that transpired during the Imperial period. It was written down long after the Imperium fell. The many obscure vocabulary items in it are also not convincing as to its antiquity; vaguely-understood interment terms from the Imperial period such as *mdad*, *mkhyud*, and *mchad* remained in circulation and are found in historical texts centuries later, showing that some ancient vocabulary long survived as frozen lexical items. Such terms are not, however, found in the *'Dur bon* collection of Bon ritual texts, nor are they otherwise any more significant in Bon-po materials than in Chos-pa. PT1042 therefore stands in some isolation from later Bon tradition. It is a unique and highly unusual text.[47]

We will see in the work of Bzhad-pa'i Rdo-rje in the next chapter (n. 41) that ancient concepts and phrasings derived from the inscriptions are often included in his work, as well as in those of other authors interested in Tibet's religious antiquity, in the context of Bon cosmology. Rather than seeing these as good evidence of knowledge about a situation nearly a millennium before, from a poorly documented period of Tibetan history, we should see these as the passive acceptance of claims by the Bon tradition about their court experience. It is even the case that later Buddhists, especially the Gsar-ma traditions, would have been interested in accepting the claims of the Bon-po after several centuries of Phyi Dar "historical" tradition which painted them as principal opponents at the courts of the btsan-pos.

Precisely why would the Bon tradition represent itself as having previously served the court? If it arose early in post-Imperial Tibet, as objective evaluation suggests—based in part on the lack of any verifiably ancient documents authored by them—then we should seek a cause from that time. This leaves the most likely explanation to be competition with the Rnying-ma tradition, which made claims for its imperial-period origins in the person of Padmasambhava. The assertions of the Bon and Rnying-ma traditions are, however, belied by the fact that when it comes to the central concepts of the Imperium—the nature of the btsan-po and the Sku Bla, internal politics at the courts, rituals performed there, etc.—neither gives us convincing, or even adequate, information that they have a knowledge about that time which would have come from their abiding presence at court.

Although I believe the position just put forward to be reasonable, it is not out of order to consider from another point of view the absence of primary data from the Imperial period. We noted in Chapter One that there is no Old Tibetan document which could not have been composed by Buddhists, and that monks certainly served the Imperium by performing scribal duties such as the composition of at least some inscriptions, etc. These documents certainly passed some sort of censorial process, a conclusion arrived at precisely *because* no documents adversarial to the Imperium have been found. The same can be said about documents adversarial to Buddhism. Although it is difficult to use a negative assertion effectively, it cannot be denied that Buddhists at court *may* have used their position to effectively suppress the status of Bon-pos by simply not composing anything about them. Had Bon-pos not had much status at court, or had a very limited function, there may not have been the need even to refer to them. Again, this is not at all a likely scenario, but it cannot be completely excluded.

Conclusions

A survey of materials which provide a bridge between the Imperium and the Phyi Dar reveals that those rites for which we have the longest-lasting and richest sources are Buddhist. This makes sense, based on assertions made in Chapter One. Confession rites were valuable to the Sanghas of the btsan-pos, and later Sanghas continued using them to make themselves useful to courts. The same process is revealed in the continuity of *rim gro/sku rim* rites. On the other hand, we really have only anecdotal and non-contemporary evidence of specifically Bon rites at the courts of the btsan-pos.

Even if the Bon tradition existed at the imperial court, its position must have been very minor compared to the activities of Buddhist monks. In the absence of any other named group of religious specialists, the perhaps surprising conclusion of this brief survey is that Sanghas could have performed any sort of rite the courts felt were needed. (We know they were also involved in funeral rites for btsan-pos, which required sacrifices that should have disqualified them.) There really is no need to postulate either Bon-pos, or an as yet unknown and unnamed group, to perform the major categories of rites that contemporary historical and other sources show were most important: Treaty and oath rites; healing and protective acts; confession rites; and, burial

rites. Buddhists were involved in all of these. Skepticism about the Bon tradition at court also comes from their representation in Phyi Dar sources, beginning with the *Sba bzhed* traditions. Two groups arise in the latter as foes of Buddhists: The Bon-pos and the Mu-stegs-pas, at the court of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan. Neither is mentioned in authentic Imperial-period documents, and their role in later documents is to be threats *not* to the authority of the btsan-pos, but to the Buddhists. The scenarios in which they function show no realistic understanding of an Imperial court. The *Sba bzhed* is a transitional document which mixes some memory of the Imperium with motifs meant to apply earlier practices to current situations. Groups such as the Bon-pos and Mu-stegs-pas had a more powerful presence in the early Phyi Dar. One clear indication of this is the manner in which Khri Srong Lde Brtsan is pictured when these groups come to the fore. He acts only as a referee between the presentations of various groups at courts, particularly later in the document. Such a scenario fits much better the work of monks who were imagining their place at a court, recounting what must have been the difficulties of their situation there. That they present themselves largely in control of that court is the best evidence of its later composition.

The other observation here is that *rim gro* is a categorical term. This means that it has no definition *per se*; it is a cover term for a variety of rites addressing a variety of purposes. Such a concept accords with our idea here of court religion: A variety of practitioners, Buddhists as well as perhaps non-Buddhists, performed rites useful to the btsan-po and his family. Where these rites originated, and who performed them, is secondary to that purpose. As with the Mongols and the Turks, we have good information about who performed some rites, but not so much for others. The only criteria for determining their presence at court was their ability to provide a known service to the rulers and the Imperium.

Methodological observations

Rituals in all periods of Tibetan history deserve a thorough study. Data in them complement, often in unexpected ways, that found in doctrinal and other sources on Tibetan Buddhism. Long understudied by students of Buddhism, and in particular those of Tibetan Buddhism, ritual materials allow us to see the practical ways in which Sanghas made

themselves useful to a leadership (the btsan-pos and their courts), as well as to the general citizenry in later periods. In other words, more than other sources they allow us to see how Buddhism was a useful resource in a variety of contexts and eventually made itself indispensable in Tibet.

However, as with the examination of any other body of data, one finds what one looks for. If we study rituals for their encultured political and social contents, we can more easily reconstruct the evolution of the political and religious institutions of Tibet. And, more than any other category of religious data, rituals help us connect values from the earliest known Tibetan culture with those of the most recent times.

Endnotes

[1] An interesting example is the anonymous *sku lnga'i gsol mchod* on pp. 690–692 of the *Bla ma'i rnal 'byor dang yi dam khag gi bdag bskyed sogs Zhal 'don gces btus*, published in Dharamsala in 1992. It is a rite with Tantric elements centering on the figure of Pe-har, a protective spiritual being whose origin in Tibet is said to go back to the time of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, when it was brought from the Uyghur peoples in the north.

In this work, Pe-har has his own court with advisors (*blon po*), etc. As was mentioned above, according to the principle of bivalence, Tibet's world of spiritual beings seems to have always been filled with courts, armies, etc.; in other words, their own political realms and hierarchies. Their world of spiritual beings parallels that of traditional Tibetan society of the Imperial period. In this work, Pe-har is called forth from among the thirty Dregs-pa'i Sde Dpon. The latter phrase has reference to groups of spirits in religious contexts, but both of its elements also have straightforward political references. *dpon* is a categorical term for a government official; it is translated by *nāyaka*, a traditional term for functionary or official in India. *sde dpon* is also, in fact, a well-attested Imperial-period term for a government official in charge of a *sde*. The latter word also has meaning as a translation term for the Sanskrit *sena*, which means army, but is also used in ritual and cosmological literature to describe the organization of spiritual beings; *sde* = *sena* as an army, either of human or non-human beings.

This is a brief *pūjā*, with this stated purpose (p. 691f): *Gangs Ljongs yul 'dir 'thab rtsod mu ge nad / dus kyi 'khrug pa ma lus zhi bar mdzod / dga' ba'i dpal ldan sde bzhi'i pho brang che'i / chos srid zung du 'jug pa'i mnga' thang dar / chab srid brtan cing dbu rmog btsan pa sogs / zhi rgyas dbang drag 'phrin las ma lus sgrubs.*

The question is, Is this an Imperial-period document? Its phrasing would seem to support that. On the other hand, as evidenced here several times, some imperial phraseologies were never lost to the Tibetans, who had access to several of the inscriptions. (The *Sba bzhed* materials also show that earlier religio-political terms were preserved in Phyi Dar Buddhist environments.) Furthermore, the desire to mitigate or avoid famine and social disorder are generic goals in rituals throughout Tibetan history. However, there does seem to be a plaintive note in the reference to "troubled times" that could easily refer to the late Imperial period.

This text contains many political, "non-Buddhist" terms, but in an essentially Buddhist framework. This is *de rigueur* for materials we have about ancient spiritual beings that the Buddhist tradition also considers "pre"-Buddhist, such as the Brtan-ma Bcu-gnyis,

who have been appropriated into many Rnying-ma rituals. What sets this text, and a few others like it, apart is that the Buddhist content is minimal. In the vast Rnying-ma ritual literature it is usually difficult to discern the true antiquity of contents that claim to represent Imperial doings, precisely because they mix well a later, normative terminology with traditional Tibetan categories. Therefore, even repeating the names and categories of ancient spiritual beings in a Tantric ritual context is not persuasive. We cannot say whether this ritual is contemporary or a projection—a Rnying-ma interpretation (see the last verse)—of Imperial antiquity meant to reinforce the notion that traditions from that time have passed directly to them.

It would be very valuable to analyze as many such rites as possible that have been gathered by, e.g., Rgod-kyi Ldem-phru-can and other early Rnying-ma figures. The significance of such an effort is not so much to "reconstruct" ancient Tibetan religion, an effort which would be problematic for several reasons. Rather, it is to understand more precisely how the Rnying-ma tradition used local spiritual beings, in connection with claims about Padmasambhava, etc., to legitimize their tradition by connecting it with imperial power and times. Likewise, political concerns suffuse many *gter ma* and their rituals, and in Chapter Four we will briefly consider how they relate to the political rituals of the Gsar-ma traditions, especially those of the Dge-lugs-pa, and how the interplay of these two was central to the creation of what we now know as "Tibetan Buddhism".

[2] *rim* has been related to *'brim* (BDRA DKROL.885). The latter verb, which means "to distribute, pass around", seems appropriate in a compound generally referring to offering rites, such as those at the tomb of Lde'u Cung, as well as the regular rites at the *bang so*s of the btsan-pos. However, we also know that *rim gro* covered much more than offering rites.

Because *gro* is almost certainly the correct spelling (*'gro* occurs only rarely as a variant in Old Tibetan materials, and we have no tradition of an allograph *gro* in place of *'gro*), and there is no modern verb which corresponds to it, we need to understand its meaning as a verb; *rim* is almost certainly used here adverbially, as in *rim par* or *rim du*. This phrase must also be understood separately from the meaning of *sku rim*, since any semantic relationship between the two terms is assumed, and evidence does not exist to determine the meaning of either phrase clearly.

[3] The Fifth Dalai Lama provides much context for *rim gro* in the Dge-lugs-pa tradition. He uses the phrase *spyi sgos kyi rim gro*, acknowledging generic and particular forms of the rite. Examples of the latter include *gegs sel rim gro*, *dam za'i rim gro*, and one variety with overtly political significance, *lo gsar mtshams la Rgya'i dmag sogs bzlog pa'i rim gro*. Once, he refers to the generic rite as *nges med kyi rim gro*, i.e., 'non-specific'. In the same work [GTAM PHUD.I.224.1–2], we read: . . . *lo legs nad med sems can bde bar bshad / de lta na'ang res gza' gtso ba'i phyir / than pas rtsi shing skem shing mu ge yis / yul 'khor la gnod mi rje'i tshogs la 'tshe / 'tshe ba'i nad sogs 'byung bar bshad pa'i phyir / zlog byed gangs can 'gyur ro cog gi bka' / sgrogs shing gnas chen rnams la sri zhur byed / dge 'dun bsnyen bkur ngan long sbyin pa gtong / mdos zor dkar nag lto sogs rim gror 'bad*. I.e., the motives for *rim gro* are the same as given in the ancient text cited in n. 1 above. We find the Fifth Dalai Lama's concept of *rim gro* in the last passage. Again, it is used as a cover term for a variety of rites, such as *mdos*, black and white *zor*, *lto*, etc.

These and other attestations of *rim gro* as a generic term, when compared with similar Buddhist contexts (see below), show that it really always was, it seems, a complete equivalent of *vidhi*. In other words, it literally referred to a structured, ritual act as a way to approach a problem. It is not so much a term for "ritual"—which is much better covered by Tibetan *chog/cho ga*—as for a magical act carried out in a programmed way to approach a problem. This seems a strikingly Indic way to rebalance the universe, and again raises the question of perhaps even more ancient influences from the south at the courts of the Imperium and in Tibetan culture in general. As both a Buddhist approach to problem-solving and as a continuation of perhaps pre-Buddhist traditions, this is

a method which makes sense in a world of spiritual beings that are all fundamentally equal in power, have the same arbitrary nature, and that all act up in basically the same ways (e.g., by sending illness, bad weather, social upset, etc.).

Sources of the terms and phrases given at the beginning of this note are: GTAM PHUD.I.28 and GTAM PHUD.II.57,62,112,137, and 219.

[4] See their "Sun zlog—Abwenden von Störungen", in *Documenta barbarorum: Festschrift für Walther Heissig zum 70. Geburtstag*, p. 57. Two shortcomings of this traditional interpretation are that it doesn't address any particular purpose(s) of the rite, and it retains the final, presumably verbal element in its attested spelling, *gro*, but interprets it as if it were spelled *'gro*. As mentioned above, this is a problem in interpreting *rim gro* that has not been addressed, and we receive no help from standard lexicons. (The earliest lexicons also do not cite *rim du/par 'gro ba* or compounds of this sort.) Post-Imperial Buddhist tradition, as this phrase shows, Buddhacized this term to fit it into the *krama/vidhi* concept behind Indic beliefs and ritual procedures. Alexis Sanderson has also pointed out that that, in Kashmir Shaivism, *kramapūjā* is very close to *rim gro*. However, the problem of explaining the significance of *gro* remains.

[5] *Prajñā-pāramitā-ratna-guṇa-saṃcaya-gāthā: Sanskrit and Tibetan text*, p. 26. For an English translation, see Edward Conze, *The Perfection of Wisdom in eight thousand lines & its verse summary* (Bolinas, CA: Four Seasons Foundation, 1975), p. 17.

[6] We learn some things from, again, Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag 'Phreng-ba, an historian with an exceptionally sophisticated view of his subject. Also see GTAM PHUD.I.552f, the Dge-bsnyen Rim-gro-pa, well known as Dharma-ta in a ritual narrative, and n. 12, below, for a quote from the translation of the *Bhadrakālpikasūtra* using the phrase *rim gro ba*.

[7] It has been asserted that *sku* as used in these phrases renders them honorific. There are several arguments against this. Foremost is that *sku* would not be genitively connected to *rim gro* if it were an honorific class term. Since *rim gro* is used with reference to btsan-pos without *sku*, it also would not seem necessary to add a prefix to create an honorific form of the phrase. For the real distinction between these terms, see below.

[8] The prominence of Chinese monks in this story *may* be historically accurate. Their presence could be explained by assuming that, due to questions about his legitimacy, Khri Srong Lde Brtsan depended more on members of that Sangha than other btsan-pos. This reasoning argues for the validity of this narrative in the *Sba bzhed*, since in most Phyi Dar traditions Chinese Sanghas are negligible presences at Khri Srong's court (as well as all others). Another sign that Phyi Dar agendas controlled descriptions in most *chos 'byung* is that btsan-pos and their courts are described there in a very stereotypical manner, while here there is an occasionally vivid description which goes against those later interests.

Balanced against this is the obvious motive that the writers had for over-emphasizing the presence of a Chinese Sangha in Tibet, since Sba Gsal Snang was famously sent to China by Khri Srong Lde Brtsan to bring back Chinese Buddhist teachers.

[9] We find, with *sku rim*, a much more restricted semantic range in Indic equivalents. There is a single Sanskrit compound, one whose meaning, again, cannot be shown to be contemporaneous with Old Tibetan materials or Imperium values: In the MV, we have the phrase *sku rim par 'tsham pa* (MV.288) = *anupūrvagātraḥ* or *sku rim par 'cham pa* (*MV/Ishihama*.286), "being in accordance/agreement with the *sku rim pa*". The Sanskrit term employs an overly literal meaning of *sku*, one which requires interpretation to make sense, and that sense doesn't seem to correspond to its oldest meaning in Tibetan. *sku rim* is not found in the MDV or other early lexicons. We are free to conclude that, in lexicons at least, the term was cut loose from its older application and was in transition to the value it has had for centuries in Buddhism, i.e., rites for the care of Buddhist spiritual beings, their statues, etc., to ensure protection and blessing.

The observation made by A.H. Francke that the *sku rim* ceremony in the Old Tibetan documents was exclusively a healing rite, in an appendix to *Serindia: detailed report*

and exploration in Central Asia and westernmost China (Oxford, 1921, v. 3, p. 1465), is not supported by data in the *Sba bzhed* and is also not otherwise helpful for a clear understanding of the term.

If the material in the *Sba bzhed* traditions are illustrative of its older application, by the time of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros Rgyal-mtshan, the "Mongol Thwarter", b. 1552, we can see that its meaning had changed nearly to that which we see also among Dge-lugs-pas, who established a Sku Rim Grwa Tshang at Se-ra in the eighteenth century as an institution for the teaching of Tantric rites in general. For them as well, the originally more specific *sku rim*, a subset of *rim gro*, has come to have the most general application.

To return to Sog-bzlog-pa. He was responsible for the single most significant act of political ritual in Tibetan history, "repelling" a Mongol incursion which was such a threat that it resulted in the travel of Bsod-nams Rgya-mtsho, later the Third Dalai Lama, to the Mongol court. His success was the result of the application of a set of teachings he received from his teacher, Zhig-po Gling-pa (1524–1583), called the *dmag bzlog nyer lnga*, "twenty-five ways to repel an army". Sog-bzlog-pa traces this teaching back to Sngags Dznā-na(kumāra), a disciple of Vairocana the translator, and explains how Zhig-po Gling-pa received it. The empowerment Sog-bzlog-pa received is connected with *sku rim*, so we must ask what meaning it had in his time. The concept has been re-interpreted only enough to fit harmoniously into the practice of a Rnying-ma visionary tradition (*Sog-bzlog bgyis tshul gyi lo rgyus*, column 208: *mkha' 'gro ma rus pa'i rgyan can bzhis senge ge'i khri dar zab gyi rgyan bkod pa khyad par 'phags pa'i zur bzhi la dngul gyi thag pa brtags nas / 'then pa'i khri der nga bzhag nas / Rnga Yab du O-rgyan gyi drung du sleb pa rmi gsung 'dug / bdag la sku rim 'chi bslu 'dra gyis phebs pa rnams byas nas / rten 'brel 'di 'dra bas skye 'chi la dbang thob pa'i sprul pa'i sku rnams bstan pa dang sems can gyi don la brtan par bzhugs pa'i dgongs pa gtod pa bka' drin bskyangs dgos zhus*…

In this vision, we see how the concept of *sku rim* was combined with Tantric elements. Instead of being performed by Buddhist monks (and perhaps others) for the sake of a ruler, it is now being administered by Ḍākinīs to avoid untimely death. Enthronement is now on the lion's throne of a *sngags pa*, and his spiritual support is not his family but the innumerable tulkus who also have obtained power over life and death. The role of ancestors in *gnam* 'heaven' has been taken by these tulkus in their paradise, Padmasambhava's Copper Mountain in Oḍḍiyāna. The extra life-time benefits not the Imperium, but all sentients. Significantly, it is clearly stated here that *sku rim* are the equivalent of *brtan bzhugs* rites, which is a Phyi Dar expression of the desire of supporters for the long life of a teacher or important lama. Once again, protection and leadership of the Tibetan community has shifted from the politico-religious to the "purely" religious sphere.

Although Sog-bzlog-pa attributes his methods, which he also refers to as *rim gro*, to the teachings of Padmasambhava (*ibid.*, column 251), they are general "Tantric" methods still practiced, such as the creation of *lingga, mdos*, etc. Most are actually what we could refer to as the products of a general "Himalayan" culture complex, so his practices rest as much on accepted Tibetan methods as anything which entered with Indic Tantric culture. Reference to native Tibetan spiritual beings in contexts not clearly Tantric (*ibid.*, column 256, the 'Gong) also shows that, in this respect, Sog-bzlog-pa was depending on Tibet's ancient spiritual inhabitants to defend it as much as on that of his Rnying-ma teachers. (The basis for this, again, was the oathing by Padmasambhava of these beings to support the Dharma.)

[10] On the points in this paragraph see WALTER.M.2004.160–162, and *ibid.*, "The significance of the term *ring lugs*: religion, administration, and the sacral presence of the btsan-po".

[11] Again, the *Sba bzhed* tradition shows that an understanding of the political nature of *sku* was inherent in the Sangha's support of the rites described here to nurture and

protect the btsan-pos. The authors of this passage knew that it was a matter of strengthening the occult body of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan so that he would be able to become the successful Buddhist ruler his Sangha and Buddhist ministers wanted and needed.

In DPA'-BO.1985.312, we are in the midst of an extensive quote from the *Sba bzhed*, one relating to the second rite quoted above. Here we read: *de Mgos kyis thos nas rje 'bangs kun tshogs pa'i dus su Zhang Nya Bzang gis Rgyal po* <u>*sku chags che ba'i rim gro*</u> *bya bar rigs so de la rje'i zhabs tog pa "su che ba khas long" zer bas*..., i.e., Minister Mgos/'Gos heard that Zhang Ma Zhang agreed to participate in the rite, so at the time of the gathering of the btsan-po and all his subjects (at court), Zhang Nya Bzang said, "Oh King! It is proper (i.e., customary) that there be a *rim gro* for increasing the growth of the *sku*." When he then said [to that], "Whoever is the greater servant of his lord, promise [this]!..."

SBA BZHED.1982.17–18 gives an rather different reading, one explaining that the nature of this undertaking is a form of *glud* or ransom rite: *de Blon-po Khri Bzang gis thos nas / rje 'bangs kun 'tshogs pa'i dus su / Zhang Nya Bzang gis Rgyal bu* <u>*sku chags che ba'i rim gro*</u> *bya bar gsol bas / Blon Khri Bzang skad nas de'i sku blud* [i.e., *glud*] *bya bar rigs so zhib tu smra na / "de la zhabs tog pa su che bas khas long" zhes*...

Several other sources, including Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag, describe other rites performed at court as being *glud*. If this information is accurate about court practice, it shows that, then as now, this was a categorical term for a variety of rites. Today one even finds *glud rabs* sometimes attached to such rites, explaining the origin and significance of the materials used.

[12] We can cite here in particular DPA'-BO.1985.25 (*yul rigs 'od gdung yab yum sras dang ni / rim gro ba dang mchog zung 'dus pa'i tshad / sku tshe bstan pa'i gnas tshad sku gdung dang / mchod rten thugs bskyed tshul rnams tha dad par /* <u>*Bskal pa bzang po'i mdo*</u> *las rgyas par gsungs*), citing the *Bhadrakālpikasūtra*. We also have GTAM PHUD.I.403, which speaks of *cho ga* taken from the *Viśeṣastava*, et al., that became famous during the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan as *Bod 'bangs rim gro*, rites to benefit Tibet's citizenry. After enumerating a variety of Buddhist ritual techniques (*tshe chog, khrus chog, gzungs sngags, bskang ba*, et al.), Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang Rgya-mtsho, the Fifth Dalai Lama, declares a separate *Ban Sngags Bon gsum so so'i lugs kyi rim gro*. He is interested in showing that Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, a virtual Cakravartin, supported non-Tantric Buddhist, Tantric Buddhist, and Bon (heterodox Buddhist) rites at his court. This view, of course, appears in a variety of Phyi Dar traditions, including the *Sba bzhed*.

[13] Again, see the XTS and JTS quotes cited in Chapter One. It should be kept in mind that, if the members swearing these oaths change their faith, any harm to the Imperium could be seen as the result of the anger of the ancestral *lha* because the contract between them and the oath-takers had been violated. This may have remained true even after Buddhist cosmology had been introduced and the *lha* had lost their special status, becoming just another sort of elevated, but transmigrating and ultimately transient, spiritual being. On the other hand, a radical change in the relationship among clan leaders and the court could have quickly taken place, and a powerful underpinning of the Imperial removed. Did this happen? Although PT016 shows that Ral-pa-can balanced the value of his Sangha with his ancestral practices, some clan leaders were probably not mollified. The little evidence that we have suggests a fractured situation at least as far back as the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, if not before.

[14] Throughout the period of the Imperium a considerable amount of military power was expended in internal control and suppression of rebellion, showing that, for whatever reason, oathing failed to produce a unified political entity. When, for example, some Yangtung (Zhang Zhung) and Dangxiang (Tangut) peoples fled to China in 692, they were either refusing to take an oath to support the btsan-po, or were violating one they had taken. Perhaps the rewards of being a people on the periphery of such a political system were outweighed by the feeling of being oppressed or exploited by it.

[15] SBA BZHED.1980.29:…*lha klu ma rung pa dngos su mi la phab nas / bsdigs shing gzir ba ni Padma-sambha-was mdzad / dkar po la chos bshad nas dam la 'dogs pa ni Bo-dhi-satwas mdzad / des ma 'thul ba Padmas sbyin bsreg mdzad nas ma mchis par byas / de 'dra la gnyis bgyis te Slob-dpon Padma'i zhal nas / "lha klu dam 'og du chud lags te / da dung de 'dra ba lan gcig bgyi 'tshal / slan chad lha chos ci bder mdzad pa dang / gtsug lag khang dgongs pa bzhin du rtsigs shig" gsung nas…*

One may again ask if the practice of binding spirits to oaths, popularly believed to have begun with Padmasambhava and Śāntarakṣita, would have been as meaningful to Tibetans, then or later, had the importance of oathing not already been so engrained in their society?

It may be simply a matter of an author's choice of terminology, but Ngag-dbang Blo-gros (born 1775) used the "old" oathing phraseology employed by the political leadership when speaking of the actions of Rnying-ma practitioners in controlling spirits (example on p. 135 of *Gu-bkra'i chos 'byung*: *sngags 'chang ma mang pos 'dzam bu gling gi mi mang po khrid nas za bar gzigs te / yang brag phug cig tu khro bo'i dkyil 'khor chen por bzhengs / mkha' 'gro ma thams cad dbang med du bkug nas bsdigs pas / de rnams 'bros par brtsams pa las / thams cad kyi yan lag la phur bus btab / phyin chad 'dzam bu'i gling gi mi rnams la gnod pa mi byed pa'i mna' bor ro*).

Even if it were only a matter of expression, the fact that the author, in the eighteenth century, freely exchanged this term with well-known Buddhist vocabulary (*dam la btags*, etc.) was only possible because his audience understood their equivalence. That the author later (p. 159) uses the old phraseology in its appropriate, Imperial context shows that he understood them to have equivalent applications.

[16] SBA BZHED.1980.35: *'Gos Khri Bzang Yab Lhag gi mchid nas / "rje gcigs la / thabs kyis ma mdzad na Bod 'bangs kha log nas dam pa'i chos bgyir mi btub / thugs dam bzhengs pa'ang mi 'grub pas gdam kha bor ba la sogs pa bgyi / gor ma chag" ces mchi.*

Such narratives point to the role of law and administration in relation to oathing. In the SBA BZHED.1982.35–36 we encounter a critique of law-by-decree, one perhaps colored by a Buddhist tradition of a more 'democratic' kingship (cf. Mahāsammata), which may have been contemplated by Khri Srong Lde Brtsan. Of course, this may well be simply a fabrication, since the *Sba bzhed* traditions place so many statements in his mouth. This text immediately follows the quote in n. 14, and describes a btsan-po who feels the need for the approval of his subjects: *thabs ji ltar bya bar mos bas / rje'i bka' gnyan pas bka' khrims dang bka' nan drag tu bka' bstsal bar lkog du chad nas Bod 'bangs kun 'tshogs te 'dus pa la rjes bka' bstsal pa / 'dzam bu gling na Bod kyi rgyal po che / Bod kyi rgyal po la nga bas che ba ni sngar ma byung na / nga la phyag ris med pas / da nga phyag ris che ba cig byed pas / khyed Bod 'bangs mdzangs pa rnams gleng.* (For *phyag ris* as "accomplishment", see BRDA DKROL.493.)

[17] BKA' CHEMS.104: p. 104: *dkon mchog mkha' 'gro dpang du byas mna' yang bskyal*, calling upon the Triratna (Dkon Mchog Gsum) and Ḍākinīs as witnesses in taking members of the Tshal-pa into his confederacy. Early Bka'-gdams-pa and Rnying-ma-pa literatures as well find active roles for Ḍākinīs as embodiments of the Triratna. Buddhist oaths in the inscriptions and other early Old Tibetan materials do not mention Ḍākinīs. This is another minor argument against the significance of Tantric culture in Imperial times.

As we see here and in an above reference, Ḍākinīs take on political significance in the Phyi Dar as intermediaries who ratify political relationships in a Buddhist system. (For their precise political value, see n. 38, below). Their ultimate importance, however, rests on their function in post-mortem transformation. The *Bu chos* illustrates a 'cradle to grave' Buddhist polity which expanded upon that described for monks in the service of btsan-pos in the *Sba bzhed*. One's ancestors are given admittance to these Buddhist regions upon having dissolved into the Dharmadhâtu. The dominance of photistic elements in this system provided a basis for later generations to associate dissolving

into light with the deaths of btsan pos. At BU CHOS.203 we read: … *mkha' 'gro'i tshogs kyang rang bzhin gnas su dengs / nga yang 'od 'dra mkha' la yal te 'gro / zhes gsungs pa'i mod la / mkha' 'gro ma'i tshogs thams cad kyang rang bzhin gyi gnas su dengs te mi snang bar gyur / bla ma dri ma med pa'ang chos kyi dbyings su thim nas mi snang bar gyur / yab yum mes 'khor dang bcas pa thams cad kyang 'od kyi rnam par mkha' 'gro ma'i pho brang nas 'thon te yab bde spyod kyi pho brang du 'khod do.*

[18] BKA' CHEMS.116: „*khyed Phag-mo Gru-pa'i phyi nang bar gsum du zing dang dkrug thur byed ri / khyed Slob-dpon Byang-chub Rgyal-mtshan da lan Dben Sha-pa'i drung du mjal du byon pa la phar nyed gyod med pa byas nas / Sne-gdong du khams bzang por mi sprod re*" *zer ba'i* *<u>mna' tshig byas</u>*…

(On the use of *ri*/*re* here, see below.)

The variety of phrasing in oaths is a subject worthy of study. Compare this oath with that in the CHRONICLE and that accompanying the Skar Chung inscription at DPA'-BO.1985.410, for example.

For an overview of the system within which this oathing functioned, see Leonard W. van der Kuijp, "On the life and political career of Ta'i-si-tu Byang-chub Rgyal-mtshan (1302–?1364)". *Tibetan history and language: studies dedicated to Uray Géza on his seventieth birthday* (Wien: Arbeitskreis für tibetische und buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 1991), pp. 277–327.

[19] … *de'i mthar don 'gangs la bltas pa'i rdo snum lcags mna' sho sogs 'dam kha byed / ri tshig gzhung nas bkod dgos* … in *Bod kyi dus rabs rim byung gi khrims yig phyogs bsdus Dwangs byed ke ta ka*, p. 215.

This rite is similar in detail to that described in the few works of Dharmaśāstra devoted to such methods. On these see: *The Divyatattva of Raghunandana Bhaṭṭācārya: ordeals in classical Hindu law* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981), p. 43 and 213 (latter a parallel example from the *Pitāmaha*, an eponymously named Dharmaśāstra treatise). Raghunandana Bhaṭṭācārya (active between 1515 and 1575) describes a favorite ordeal for thieves and adulterers. The only difference in the procedure from that described here is that a lump of gold is thrown into the oil, not stones of different colors. In both cultures, the same result indicates innocence: The fingers dipped into the oil are immediately wrapped. After several days the fingers are inspected; if there is no sign of burning, the accused is declared innocent.

This ordeal was often performed in Hindu temples, leading us to speculate that the practice had been borrowed from them into Buddhist monasteries, by which venue it entered Tibet.

The connection between oaths, truth statements and ordeals is ancient and well developed in India; we may find other customs carried from there into Tibet and other regions of Central Asia. See on this subject E.W. Hopkins, "The oath in Hindu epic literature".

[20] For example, at the end of the Skar Chung inscription (ll. 52–55) we read: *btsan po yab sras kyïs / 'dï bzhin du yï dam bca'o /… 'jïg rten las 'das pa dang 'jïg rten gyï lha dang myï ma yïn pa thams cad kyang / dpang du gsol te / btsan po rje blon kun kyïs kyang / dbu snyung dang / bro bor ro.* [LI & COBLIN.320]

This fascinating set of statements shows the blending of religious beliefs at the court of Sad-na Legs. At first, the ruler and his son pledged themselves to their *yi dam*, the Buddhist deity of their vows, to follow the contents of the inscription. Then, Sad-na Legs and his advisors also performed the non-Buddhist form of the oath, but using concepts from Buddhist cosmology. (Note that the phrase for the btsan-po's oath is *dbu snyung*, while that of his advisors *bro bor*.) Was the intent here to equate the *lha* of the royal family with the *'jig rten las 'das pa* and those of the advisors with the *'jig rten gyi lha* (= *yul lha* or *gzhi bdag*)? This would accord with other examples of the absorption of the power of "pre-Buddhist" royal spiritual beings into a Buddhist cosmology given in Chapter Two, n. 74.

On the understanding of the *lha* of the clans here as *yul lha* (= *lha skyong*) see the quote in the next note.

We also have this interesting note by Dung Dkar Blo-bzang 'Phrin-las, citing the XTS, expanding on how oaths were concluded in the Imperial period. [DEB DMAR.293; cf. BOD KYI.49] The terminology here—e.g., *mna' bskyel* and *mna' chu*—is not truly Old Tibetan; the latter form is a substitution for a Chinese term: *khas len dam bca' byas te mna' bskyel pa'i ste* [!] / *sngar Bod kyi rgyal blon rnams mnyam du tshogs nas mna' bskyel ba'i tshe / mna' chu zhes pa lha la mchod pa phul ba'i chu dang chang nas phran bu re btung / sems can bsad pa'i khrag btung ba'am kha la byugs pa bcas byed srol yod pa.*

Again (cf. Chapter One, n. 24) we direct the reader to the remarks of Imaeda Yoshiro ("Rituel des traités de paix sino-tibétains du VIII^e au IX^e siècle", p. 95), to the effect that there are questions as to which part of the treaty rites was essentially of Chinese origin, and which Tibetan. The narrative above may well be a conflation; some, such as Friedrich Bischoff in the article cited in this work, assert that the XTS narrative refers to Chinese custom.

Since they were an integral part of the diplomatic life of pre-modern Central Eurasia, it is easy to understand why such rites, even in the details of their elements and procession, can be found among many widely-spread peoples. Cf. the Turkic treaty rite of the Cumans of Mongol times in Denis Sinor, "Taking an oath over a dog cut in two", in *Altaic religious beliefs and practices* (Budapest: Research Group for Altaic Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences), pp. 301–307.

Offering water to the *lha* may be a reference to the *gser skyems* rite, which became very widespread in the Phyi Dar but is not found in Old Tibetan documents from the Imperial Period. (It is found in PT1042, on which see below, as well as in SBA BZHED.2000.24.) This speculation is based on the interpretation of a rite mentioned in Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅginī* which is examined by Berhnard Kölver in "Kashmirian traces of ancient oath ceremonies". The analysis revolves around the phrase *kośam pā*, "to drink the libation". The rite has two principal functions: to make an oath swearing between parties (perhaps with an accompanying offering to the image of a deity or the sacrifice of a ram, q.v. Kölver, pp. 135–6), and to serve as what Kölver, p. 138, describes as an ordeal (wherein the swearer drinks the water and then, if something evil befalls him within a certain period of time, he is judged to have sworn falsely). By itself, this seems very similar to the above description of the Tibetan rite. It also illustrates what the observant reader may have noticed in all political rites: There is a religious element, whether explicitly stated or not, and this element needs to be taken into account to understand the rite in its complete context. (For example, we are ignorant of the rites which accompanied the oathing at the conclusion of, e.g., the Bsam-yas founding and inscription.)

By an interesting turn we can see a close relationship with *gser skyems*, which we find in lexicons as "a drink which is a stuff for offering to the *lha*" (e.g., *Bod Rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*). Although *gser skyems* is not attested as an element of religious practice at court, *skyems* by itself is prominent in early materials—it is already attested in the *Chronicle* (PT1287/DTH.107) as a term for festive drinking at court, and we have seen that such "festive drinking" was often linked with oathing and truth-saying. The *kośa* is described as "golden" in the Indo-Iranian tradition. This is interpreted symbolically by Kölver, who brings forward no examples wherein the water actually contained gold. Placing gold powder in it could have been local custom or a Tibetan innovation, with gold so readily available. *gser chab* is, indeed, mentioned in late Old Tibetan materials and some early histories; according to the lexicons, it literally refers to gold mixed in water. (A search of Dharmaśāstra literature might be enlightening as to whether gold was put into liquids for swearing in Indic culture.) We learn from Samten Karmay, in his "L'âme et la turquoise: un rituel tibétain", p. 106, that it was sometimes, at least

(as opposed to the description in Jäschke and in some other ethnographic studies, as, e.g., on the Tamang), literally a matter of a *lump* of gold in a drink.

How such a concept entered Tibet, whether at a very early period—since it is attested, as shown by Kölver, in the Avesta and Vedic literature, and thus qualifies as an example of a CECC rite—or as a result of later, direct contact that came along with Buddhists and Newars to the Tibetan court, cannot be determined. The triangular similarity between offerings made to gods via water, of oathing made to those in power, and of gold in the liquid of some such offering (and of the importance of gold in oathing in general, on which see Hopkins, *op. cit.*) provides similarities too great to be ascribed to chance.

[21] Dung Dkar Blo-bzang 'Phrin-las (in his notes to the *Deb ther dmar po* at DEB DMAR.293) states that invoking the name of the *lha* as a witness was essentially a "rite of truth" (*bden pa bsdar*), one which is recorded among early Indo-European peoples, and is particularly well-studied in Indian culture. Perhaps more significant in Dung Dkar's note, unfortunately not attributed, is that we learn that it is *yul lha* that are called to witness:…*mna' skyel bka' gtsigs 'jog skabs rang rang so sos dad pa byed yul lha rnams kyi ming smos nas dpang por 'bod pa'i tshig brjod pa la zer*.

This calls into question which *lha* the btsan-pos might have called to witness; almost certainly, from context, it would have been their ancestors in heaven (*gnam*). This may again allow us to see a distinction in place and nature between the *lha* of the btsan-pos, those of the nobility in general, and other sorts of *lha*.

[22] See here: Hugh Richardson, "The sKar-cung inscription" (JRAS.1973.12–20), p. 18, who notes the apposition of *gzhig re/spang re* with *myi gzhig go/myi spang ngo* in the inscription. His explanation, "The construction with *re*—a sort of rhetorical question: 'how should one do such a thing?'…", is not correct. If *re* were an ellipsis for the term *re skan*, which is an anachronistic assertion, then the negative meaning is to be inferred in all cases, whether or not negation is attached to the verb. This is, in fact, shown in some of the later uses of *re* in translations cited by Walter Simon ("The Tibetan particle *re*", p.123).

Simon's citation of *re skan* as "how much less" (Skt. *kutas*) on p. 126, with its implicit negation, help us understand how the translators of the DTH were able to assume that *re* is = *re skan*. (Simon retreated from this position in his follow-up article, "Tibetan *re* in its wider context" because of a complicated and unnecessary analysis based on his assertion of a pronominal prefixed *to a particle*. Although he cites some Old Tibetan examples on p. 562 of this article, he abandons support of *re* as having an essentially negative meaning; this was a mistake. A further weakness in Simon's argument is that he does not consider *re* a verbal, which it is by word order and function.)

[23] *She bam chen mo'i dper mdzod* further describes, on p. 119, another ordeal, that of touching the tongue three times with a hot iron, literally, ‚touching the iron' (*lcags ldag pa*)—if the speech is true, the tongue is not harmed. The immediate context is conflict among groups of monks from local areas (*khams tshan*) in Dge-lugs monasteries.…: *bdag Se-ra Byes tsha ba khams tshan gyis lcags ldag pa'i ri tshig gtsang ma phul ba'i 'gag*…(On *she bam*, a high form of official government document, see Dieter Schuh, „Zum Entstehungsprozess von Urkunden in den tibetischen Herrscherkanzlein". *Contributions on Tibetan language, history and culture*. Wien: Arbeitskreis für tibetische und buddhistische Studien, 1983, vol. 1, pp. 303–308; cf. esp. p. 313 and 322.)

[24] At DPA'-BO.1985.648.18 there is reference to *ri'i zhe mna'*, 'a willing oath on a mountain'.

We do find a reference in JTS.2 that the ancient Tibetans swore oaths "to the gods" of heaven, earth, mountains, rivers, etc. Given the sketchy Chinese knowledge usually shown in such matters, and with our own incomplete understanding of early Tibetan spiritual beings, what this source seems to refer to is rather a matter of swearing by the *yul lha* wherever they are found. Of course, this does not support a "mountain cult" as an independent or special religious element in Tibetan belief. The difference

may not seem great, but students of religion aware of the concept of *animism* as an explanation of "primitive" religion realize how naïve it can be to assume that a location and a power resident there are the same thing. We have no evidence that the Tibetans were ever "animists", and since early sources give locations of *lha* also in groves and soil, it does not make sense to speak of cults of tree stands and the earth, as well as mountains. (This is not to speak of the fact that *lha* were at this time usually ancestral spiritual beings, and that this dimension of belief seems to have completely eluded the Chinese.) We are again reminded of the fundamental similarity between the Tibetan *lha* and the Mongol *qad* and *ejed*. All were spiritual beings in control of set areas. Most of them were ancestral spirits or the spirits of heroes, etc., and they could reside in a variety of locations.

[25] See Jànos Makkay, *Iranian elements in early Mediaeval heroic poetry* (Budapest: J. Makkay, 1998). Note the comments about the special construction and significance of the cup of the ruler at the Sassanid court. Older imagery and meaning also survived in Europe, where it was enriched by Christian symbolism to create an even more complex set of beliefs. On this, see Hugh Magennis, "The cup as symbol and metaphor in Old English literature".*Speculum*.60.1985.517–536.

The cup rite is also well attested at Mongol courts, where it was integrated into other important rites. [ESIN.250] One significant example of this is when Tolui offers a cup as a part of the important rite-complex in which, among other functions, Ögedei was invested as *qaghan* and offerings of food were made to the spirit of Chingis Qan. [RASHID AD-DIN.31] In what may be indirect evidence of such a function of Sanghas at Tibetan court rituals, Marco Polo reports that *baqšı*, which in this case refers to Buddhist monks (as is clear from the page following this narrative), were said to have performed miracles as they distributed cups at the court of Qubilai Qan. [*The travels of Marco Polo*, from the text of L. Benedetto, p. 100f.]

The special religious dimensions of such rites among these peoples also present interesting points of comparison with what we see at the Tibetan Court. ESIN brings forward many general observations on the religious elements in cup rites among CECC peoples which should be consulted for comparisons.

(Some have thought to derive the origin of this rite at the Tibetan court from its close neighbor, the Turks. Turkic *bor* as „grape wine" has been suggested as the origin of Tibetan *phor*, but this is unacceptable, since one word means the liquid and the other, the container. More work needs to be done to determine whether lexical elements connected with these rites have been borrowed.)

[26] See SBA BZHED.1982.59f:... *kha cig na re / de nas lug gi lo'i dgun zla 'bring po'i ngo la Bsam-yas bzhengs su gsol zin pa'i zhal bsros pra ti ha ra'i dus kyi mchod pa chen po mdzad pa'i tshe / Jo-mo Btsan Khri Rgyal-mo Btsun dang / Sru Btsun-mo Rgyal la sogs pa brgya rab tu byung ba'i Mkhan-po Sba Ratṇas bgyis / spyir de dus mi sum brgya rab tu byung nas dbu rtse'i bya 'dab dang / mchod rten chen po bzhi'i rtse mo lcags thag gis sbrel / de la 'phan mgo btags te / nam mkha' dar la bgyi / sa gzhi gyi ling rta las byas / gser phor dngul phor thams cad chab tsha dang / 'bras chang dang / nas chang gis bkang / dus 'di phan chad bka' sho chen po btang ste / chos khrims bcas / slan chad 'og gi 'bangs las pho mig mi dbyung / mo sna mi bcad / mtshang can mi dgum par snang / skye po thams cad kyis rje'i bka' nyan cing / rje 'bangs thams cad kyis rab tu byung ba la dbu'i mchod gnas su phyung la...*

Concerning the rolling of dice in the governance of the Imperium, again see also Brandon Dotson, "Divination and law in the Tibetan Empire: the role of dice in the legislation of loans, interest, marital law and troop conscription".

[27] See Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist monks and monasteries of India* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1962), p. 43, for its acknowledgement in Aśoka's edicts. The intimate connection between monks and courts in India was based, in part, on the legal nexus that bound ascetics and rulers.

[28] In lieu of a best-reading text here, I have compared the chosen (1985 Delhi) edition of DPYID KYI.58 with the extracts from it studied in "Dpyid kyi rgyal mo'i glu

dbyangs las Khri Srong Lde Btsan skor", *Gangs-can rig brgya'i sgo 'byed lde mig ces bya ba bzhugs so*, vol. 3, Beijing, 1997, pp. 76–80. There are no significant variants, save for the line *rnam snang gang gi don mi 'tshal*. The excerpt reads *Sna Nam zhgang* [sic!] *gi don mi 'tshal*. This line can be understood on the basis of the version of the narrative, which is otherwise not very similar because it lacks the formal verse statements, in *Sba bzhed*.1982.4–5: Sna Nam Zhang is the intended reading, and, thus, the one preferred reading in the extract.

[29] The question of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's legitimacy is discussed in the study of C.I. Beckwith, "The revolt of 755 in Tibet". See particulary p. 8, with its summary and analysis of this narrative.

[30] Incidentally, this passage shows that a *skyogs* or goblet was considered a sort of *phor pa*. It is commonsensical, but should be pointed out, that other sorts of drinking and serving vessels at courts could be used in what are called "cup rites". [ESIN.249f] This may explain the significance behind the gift of two great, solid gold wine flagons, nearly six feet in height, that were presented to the Chinese Court by the Tibetan Court in the JTS: Their very size were understood to be expressions of the power, splendor, and size of the comitatus and the court of the btsan-po. The point was likely not lost on the Chinese. (On this see Paul Demiéville, *Le concile de Lhasa*, p. 203n.)

[31] Examples of apparently "non-normative" practices include the *zhal bsro* and *sta gon* rites (the former attested for De-ga G.yu Tshal at IO751.35r3), and the *Sba bzhed* reports that the members of the royal family were models for statues at Bsam-yas. Most likely, these rites were patterned on practices at other Buddhist courts. Which courts?

[32] For some general remarks on this topic the reader is directed to Eva Dargyay, "Sangha and state in Imperial Tibet". She reconstructs a general overview only from later sources (the *Sba bzhed*, Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag, *et al.*), and it is not always accurate about the relationship among btsan-pos, monks and monasteries.

[33] The quotation is from "The significance of the term *ring lugs*…", p. 314n4. The sources for the translation here are: DPA'-BO GTSUG-LAG.1985.335; SBA BZHED.1982.37; the Fifth Dalai Lama's *Dpyid kyi rgyal mo'i glu dbyangs* (Pe-cin: Mi-rigs Dpe-skrun-khang, 1988), p. 58); the chronicle of Mkhas-pa Lde'u, *Mkhas-pa Lde'us mdzad pa'i Rgya Bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa* (Xining: Bod Ljongs Mi-dmangs Dpe-skrun-khang, 1987), p. 338.

Each source—including the various versions of the *Sba bzhed*—contains details not found in the others. The Mkhas-pa Lde'u, for example, opens the narrative as follows: "When the rite of *sa dpyad* was made, the four families of the Zhang Blon—children, father, and mother, who made five with the Btsan-po, all carried gold adzes, and the Btsad-po Khri Srong Lde Btsan incised the earth seven times. Each of the four children of the Zhang Blon also excised that area one time. There then appeared from deep in the earth white rice ('*bras*) and white barley (*nas*), mixed, as if a pair of offerings (*phul do*)…"

There are good reasons to accept the historicity of at least the kernal of this narrative. However, some of what may be embellishments, such as the inclusion of the "Zhang Blon" motif, strikes one as running against what appears to have been the central reason for the creation of Bsam-yas in the first place. Built at his birth-place, meant to serve him in some special way—all narratives agree on this—we should see that monastery first and foremost as a family enterprise, almost an extended altar. The central point to consider here is, again, the question of his legitimacy, and of his need to have a center of power and authority that served his needs but was outside of the traditional oathing system, and outside of Lha-sa itself.

[34] As is often the case, the details vary among the sources, and just as the *Sba bzhed* shows that it was adapted to Tibetan culture, in several of the Indic sources (the rite is also given in the *Cūlavaṃsa* and the *Mahābodhivaṃsa*) the golden (or not) plough was joined to an elephant, a long-standing symbol of the power of the state. Sometimes the rite had to do with establishing the circumference of a city, but in others it really was a matter of establishing the boundary of a monastery. Perhaps most importantly,

Faxian observed just such a ploughing rite for the founding of a monastery in Shri Lanka. We realize, from his narrative, that the significance of this ploughing rite was not to be an exercise in sovereignty, but of its relinquishment. [Paranivatana, p. 32f] All the land and property within the area so circumscribed are given over in perpetuity to the Sangha; it ceases to belong to the king. It is, in essence, an act of sacrifice of power, not of providing religious sanction to the power of the ruler, as has been asserted. [Paranivatana, p. 34.] All this accords in general with research cited here by G. Schopen that the Buddha was, in fact, the ruler of the Sangha, and then by extension of the kingdom.

Ploughing, of course, also plays into the idea of fertility. So, in addition to benefitting from sacrificing part of his kingdom to the Sangha, the ruler used this rite to demonstrate his power over nature. So, we may add that the *Aṅguttaranikāya*.II.74–76 attests that the righteousness of the king can influence the course of the sun and moon, and a sufficient harvest. The Brahmanas even make the plough and the penis metaphorically equivalent (e.g., *Śatapathabrahmaṇa*.13.2 etc.). In the end, nearly all the claims for the special nature of the ruler and his powers in South Asia are shared among works and traditions, and thus are better described as "Indic" than "Buddhist", "Hindu", etc.

As with the idea of the Cakravartin, kingship was surrounded by beliefs which enhanced its stature. This was the result of a seemingly endless, additive process wherein motifs appear in important Buddhist materials to serve as resources for various Sanghas in their relationship with leaderships in particular circumstances. For example, the ploughing rite here plays into another ancient motif (shared with the Cakravartin), which is also Indic, i.e., that in every Manu-period, the earth becomes uneven, but the first king removes the rocks, enlarges the hills and mountains, and makes the earth even to establish order. (See also here *Milindapañha*.269 for an oblique reference to a ruler's ploughing.) This rite certainly was created in relation to such beliefs. A sentiment that may have had great significance for Tibetan polity, as reflecting a nearly universal view of Sanghas, is found in the *Milindapañha*.69&270: The whole earth is the property of a properly appointed king, one who *belongs to a family of noble birth* and to the highest power. It is a combination of rule by the fittest, and preparation for that through birth to the manner, which applies to both rulers and Sanghas, insofar as the latter needed to be from an acceptable social order to be appropriate representatives to royal power.

[35] Although we are not aware of the sources used to justify this ritual, other Buddhist leaders have clearly seen the value of rituals to support the Buddhadharma in normative sources. The Fifth Dalai Lama understood the utility of the *Suvarṇabhāsasūtra* in this regard in GTAM PHUD.II.62: *<u>Gser 'od</u> las / Bcom-ldan 'Das yul gyi bdag po de dag gis gdon mi 'tshal bar Mdo Sde'i rgyal po dam pa 'di mnyan nas yongs su bzung bar bgyi zhing Mdo Sde 'di klog pa dang / 'dron pa dang / len pa dang / 'dzin pa dag la'ang bsnyen bkur ba dang / rim gro dang mchod par bgyid na bdag cag dus tshad ma mchis pa'i lha'i 'khor gzhan rnams chos nyan pa'i dge bas byin gyis brlabs pa'i mthus bla na ma mchis pa'i bdud rtsi'i chos kyi ro myong bar 'gyur bas / zhes <u>Gser 'od dam pa</u> 'di nyid nyan pa'i phan yon dngos su bstan pa'i shugs la bka' gzhan rnams la'ang don gyis thob cing / <u>Shes rab Khri pa</u> las / rab 'byor de bzhin no.*

[36] A comprehensive picture begins to appear, based on portrayals in the articles of Gregory Schopen, "Burial ad sanctos…", and "The Buddha as an owner of property and permanent resident in Medieval Indian monasteries". Politically, the Buddha functions through the *stūpa* and corporately in his Sangha very much as the ancestral leader of an Indo-European noble (*ārya*) clan. In a way interestingly similar to the ancestral btsan-pos, he remains resident in his community (in his *kurgan/stūpa*), continuing to bring benefit to those who are, in essence, both his descendants and his subjects.

One can go so far as to assert, again based on the circumlocutions in the *Milindapañha* (v. 1, pp. 26–28), that the Buddha rules his Sangha and monasteries, so he actually ruled Tibet through Bsam-yas. Upon its founding, Khri Srong Lde Brtsan was not ruling Tibet

directly, but as an agent of the Buddha, a Bodhisattva manifest for that purpose. Perhaps earlier and later btsan-pos had such beliefs, but this is the most detailed description we have of the political use of Buddhist establishments in the Imperium.

[37] The text reads: *Bod Rje blon 'khor dang bcas pa dang / sems can thams cad kyïs myï khyab pa'i tshe rabs nas dus 'di'i bar du / lus dang / ngag dang / yïd gsum gyï sgo nas nyon mongs pa'ï rgyu'am / sgye shï'ï sa bon nam / bdag dang gzhan la yongs su gdung bar 'gyur ba nye sdïg gï las chos dang 'dul ba las 'gal ba bdag gïs byas sam / gzhan bcol tam / gzhan byed pha la smon pa 'am / nga rgyal dang bsnyems pa'ï phyïr byas sam / dbang dang / mthu yod pas bdag dga' dang / dngan tsan gyï phyïr byas sam / jï phyïr byas kyang rung ste / de lta bu'ï las ngan pa // 'phags pha 'jïg las 'das pa rnams kyïs smad pha / ma rabs byïs ba lta bu phyïn ci log gï spyod yul tu gyurd pa / de rkyen dang 'bras bus ngan song gsum du rgyu ba'ï las ngan pa mtho rïs bde bar 'gro ba'ï lam gcod pa / 'khor ba'ï gshal thag tu gyurd pa / gal te de lta bu spyad pa ma 'thol ma bshags sam / ma spangs ma btang na yun rïng por shïn tu nyon mongs par 'gyur bas na da rtul cig gï steng na / rtul snyed kyï Sangs Rgyas Bcom-ldan 'Das Byang Cub Sems Dpa'ï 'khord dang bcas pa rnams mngon sum du gyurd par dran ba nye bar bzhag ste / de'ï tshad bzhïn lus re res zhabs kyï mthïl la spyï bos btugs te / sems thag pa nas 'thol lo bshags so / shïn tu 'gyod cing gnong ba'ï sems kyïs gtang ngo…*

Just a few general observations about this passage. The phraseology here is very similar to confession rites (*deśana*) used at the present day; nearly all have the fixed verbal phrases *mthol/'thol lo bshags so* or a variant in them. Also, similar confession texts in Old Tibetan are attested elsewhere (OTMET.II.#491), and these lack reference to the btsan-po or leadership. This shows that confession was a more general rite, of which the above recitation was adapted to court needs.

Reference to the *ma rabs* who are childish and cut off from better rebirth almost certainly also relates to social divisions in the Imperium. We have discussed the privileged place of the nobility in the practice of Buddhism. Here we see that lowly or ignoble behavior—presumably by anyone, but perhaps limited to the common subjects—is not simply the absence of *ya rabs* or "noble" behavior, it is actually to be condemned, from a Buddhist point of view. It could well have been the behavior of those subjects engaged in "popular" religious practices which violated Buddhist ethics. Being *ma rabs* is described as being outside Buddhism at PT016.22v3, and is also negatively portrayed at PT1287.369, the *Chronicle*, a document which is concerned with modeling correct behavior by the nobility.

Therefore, being *ma rabs* was not simply the same as not practicing noble behavior. It was both non-Buddhist *and* unacceptable behavior. Until we have more data, we are left with the clear inference, stated above, that *ya rabs* behavior was both socially noble and in accordance with Buddhist teachings. These categories relate to the *lha chos/ mi chos* categories discussed in Chapter Two, which are perhaps the most important social divisions in the Imperium.

[38] Example at BU CHOS.775:… *nam mkha'i dkyil 'khor 'di gnas tshe / rgyal ba'i thugs rje'ang mi 'grib pas / Mar-me Mdzad Dpal bde bar mchi / de ring Thugs Rje Chen-po khyod / cung zad mya ngnan mnar bar mthong / khyed kyi bde ba bskyed pa'i phyir / lta ba rnam dag gnas 'dri mchis / Jo-bo yab la gzigs gyur nas / bla ma yab sras byon pa mtshar / shes bya'i dkyil 'khor ma skyangs pas / phra rab nyes pa'i tshogs mang mthong / khrims la nang la gos srid na / rnam dag skyabs la mthol lo bshags / thos bsam sgom pas dus 'das kyang / bsrung dka'i dam tshig gis srid na / bden med nyes pa mthol lo bshags / gnyis su med pa chos sku rnams / dngos 'dzin khong skran sngar dag kyang / bden med gzung 'dzin mthol lo bshags*. In the same vein, at BU CHOS.148 we have a Ḍākinī who determines the state of the protagonist, a king, and the faults he committed (*nongs pa*) which required confession. In this example, we again see the ascent of the political importance of the Ḍākinī as the Buddhist intermediary between the power of the Sangha and local leadership.

[39] As an example, when we survey Rgod-kyi Ldem-'phru-can's *Thun mong rten 'brel*

sgrig byed pa'i rnams mnyes byed bsangs yig bzhugs we see that the received tradition of rites at Bsam-yas logically does not portray lamas, because Padmasambhava, the leader of Buddhists and model for the Rnying-ma-pa there, was a *slob dpon/ācārya* and Tantric practitioner. [p. 23f] Yet, that later author had to acknowledge (on p. 45) their role as also worthy of respect.

It seems that Gsar-ma-pa lamas, the official representatives of Sanghas based on Vinaya teachings, have always had the greater role to play in confession rites. Thus, we find this passage in another text of the Rgod-kyi Ldem-'phru-can tradition, the *Byang gter cho ga spyi 'gro'i lhan thabs Nor bu'i phra tshom* (Dharamsala: Bod Gzhung Shes Rig Par-khang, 1989), p. 38f: *bla ma sku gsum brgyud pa'i spyan snga ru / shin tu gnong zhing 'gyod pas mthol zhing bshags.*

One obvious observation is that the Rnying-ma-pa have long used Padmasambhava as a model for protective rites, while simultaneously being influenced by the rising status of lamas in the surrounding society to perform other rituals. Thus it was that, as the political power of the Dge-lugs-pas gradually developed, Rnying-ma-pa monasteries, which had originally been highly localized family affairs, came more and more to resemble those of the Gsar-ma traditions.

[40] The *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum* represents an extreme development in another direction. Since this tradition is intent on presenting Srong Btsan Sgam-po as an independent, functioning incarnation of Avalokiteśvara, it subserviates the Sangha—or at least fails to give it a significant role—even more than PT016. We thus see in early documents a variety of relationships between rulers who were considered incarnate beings and those who were to look after and serve them as such. Elements of several of these positions can be seen in the office of the Dalai Lama and its position in the Dga'-ldan Pho-brang.

For a brief compare-and-contrast essay on the relationship between the Bka'-gdams (e.g., *Pha chos* and *Bu chos*) and *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum* traditions on this point, see WALTER.M.2004.175ff.

[41] It is the most-accepted cliché (though clichés are not always untrue) about Bon in our received tradition, along with the idea that Bon was essentially a form of "shamanism" until it was Buddhacized. The permutations in thinking about Bon have been traced in Zeff Berken, "Exorcising the illusion of Bon 'Shamans': a critical genealogy of Shamanism in Tibetan religions", *Revue d'études tibétaines*.6.2004.4–77. I expressed above (Chapter One, n. 75) skepticism about whether the seemingly ecstatic figure with the bird-headdress and drum described by the Chinese to have been at Ral-pa-can's side during a treaty signing—concerning whom we have no evidence that he was, indeed, a Bon-po—could have been the same sort of religious practitioner who also managed the complicated, months-long funeral and entombment rites described in ancient texts which have later been ascribed to the Bon tradition. That the latter rites are clearly part of the CECC complex needs to be taken into consideration when looking at Bon and how local practitioners would relate to such a ritual complex. A second observation is that Buddhist monks in Tibet have almost certainly always performed "non-normative" rites (i.e., those not modeled on sutric or tantric literature from India). They could have been in charge of the entire burial ritual, even involving the sacrifice of life, on which see my "The persistence of ritual...", p. 163. (The Gshen remain so vague as to be of problematic relationship to either the Bon or Buddhist traditions in the Imperial period, and they, also, are not mentioned in Imperial-period documents. In the *Chronicle* it seems clear that Gshen is a clan name.) Even today, such "non-normative" rites remain among the most valuable services Buddhists perform in support of the general Tibetan population. Ergo, what need or place for Bon?

We have many examples above, *rim gro/sku rim* being perhaps the clearest, yet it remains to be emphasized: We have good evidence that the Sangha was instrumental in the expansion of rites available to the btsan-pos, and that no known agency (such as Bon-pos) were "in charge of" these rites before them. In other words, these Buddhists, who were, after all, Tibetans, may well have expanded the rites available at court, includ-

ing by taking over older rites. However, we still have no idea who performed them. In addition, no mention of the Bon tradition or Bon-pos is found in the expanded inscriptions from the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, with their accompanying documents, which Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag included in his *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*. Although Khri Srong Lde Brtsan lists proscribed rituals there, no one—no group inimical to Buddhism, nor Bon-pos—is given responsibility for performing them.

It is also always possible, given that Buddhists from China, Khotan, Nepal and India joined Tibetans at court, that there were conflicts among these groups as to what rituals it was appropriate for Buddhists to perform. Those who believe the Bon tradition to have been Buddhist from its origin have this logic supporting them: We know of no criteria by which the orthodoxis and orthopraxis of Buddhist traditions was determined during the entire period of the Imperium. On this, see also n. 43, below.

42 Observations about occurrences of *bon* in Old Tibetan materials can be found in Christopher Beckwith, "On Zhangzhung and Bon", to appear in *Emerging Bon* (Halle; IITBS). The most relevant observation is that there is a disconnect between the abstract noun *bon* and the other morphologically similar words in Old Tibetan usually assumed to be related to it, such as the verb *'bon*, "to call".

43 To try to sketch this out historically, paying attention to their occurrence in the oldest materials: *chos* originally referred to a ritual activity. This is certainly how Khri Srong Lde Brtsan understood the word. Thus, when we encounter the early (but not Imperial period) compound *bon chos*, we may be dealing with a hendiadys, which is why we do not find *bon gyi chos* or the less comprehensible *bon po'i chos*. What we understand from this compound is that there is *bon* ritual method, which we assume would be distinguishable from other sorts of ritual methods. PT1040/1042 shows this to be the case; in its earliest occurrences, "bon" is a method, and the phrase in the very first line of PT1040, *gsang ba'i bon gis*, supports that: "by a secret ritual method".

What we need to keep in mind here is that ritual *per se* seems to have been something that was at least partly determined by the btsan-pos. Khri Srong Lde Brtsan certainly decided which rituals were helpful and suitable, and which should not be practiced (Ch. 1, n. 84). This gives us the idea, which is borne out later, that early in the Imperium each individual religious practitioner at court would have had a *chos*, his own ritual method, which was considered on its own terms. There would have been Hindu *chos*, Buddhist *chos*, Muslim *chos* (as Islam is sometimes known today as Nag Chos), perhaps Daoist and other *chos*, clan *chos*, etc., all understood in the plural, because different rites were proposed, or were carried out differently, by various figures.

Since Khri Srong Lde Brtsan made such a proclamation, Buddhist *chos* and some of its limitations—against taking life, at least in some traditions—began to affect the practice of other rituals. Those which strayed too far from his conception of what *chos* was were banned. We have no information that this situation was abrogated during the reigns of Sad-na Legs and Ral-pa-can, and even Glang Dar-ma. Armed with this tradition, early in the Phyi Dar Bon presented itself as a *chos*, but modeled on Buddhist rites, because by that time Buddhist rituals had for some time been dominant in Tibetan political culture. If they wished to have access to courts, the nascent Bon tradition had no choice but, essentially, to copy what Buddhist monks and yogis were doing. This is as good an explanation as any for the fact that, despite some special nomenclature and a plethora of spiritual beings particular to it, the Bon tradition is, for all intents and purposes, Buddhist in form.

Especially when we are dealing with rituals composed during the Imperium or shortly (perhaps within two centuries) afterwards, we must look at their political value, or the possible political dimensions of their practice. "Rituals performed at courts for nobility" was a pattern set by the Imperium which lasted long in Tibetan history, and it seems to have been a powerful arbiter of ritual life.

44 Lalou's study of PT1042 was also published in *Manuscrits de Haute Asie, I* with facsimiles. PT1042 was later translated into English in "A study of Bon-po funeral ritual in ancient Tibet: deciphering the Pelliot Tibetan mss [sic] 1042", by Chu Junjie,

in *Theses on Tibetology in China*, Beijing, 1991, pp. 91–154. A type-set reproduction of the unique manuscript, inaccurately described as a "critical edition", can be found in CDT.4.20ff.

[45] Cf. *The Tibetan Tripitaka, Peking edition: catalogue & index* / edited by Daisetz T. Suzuki (Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation, 1962), index p. 185: Dge Dpal, AKA Dge-ba'i Dpal.

[46] It should be pointed out that the creation of a mound and holding (annual) ancestral sacrifices, parts of the burial process shared with CECC rites, and which are documented at JTS.3, are not mentioned here. This is one reason PT1042 cannot be claimed to be a comprehensive document of a royal funeral and interment rite.

[47] Through this brief critique of the position of PT1042 (as well as PT1040), we have not raised a likely scenario for the origin of *bon* as a ritual technique. It can be easily demonstrated, as we have done here for the Imperium, that the principal attraction of Buddhist groups at courts throughout Asia was the ritual support they could provide. Thus, we must entertain the notion that the term *bon*, as an abstract noun relating to ritual procedures, originated among a group of Buddhist practitioners at a court which had come to be subsumed within the Imperium. We do not have to adhere to the tenuous relationship of Bon with Zhang Zhung, as is so commonly asserted in later historical sources. (Serious consideration of this assertion should wait until Zhang Zhung has been more precisely identified, geographically, ethno-linguistically, and in terms of religious customs.) All we need imagine is some group of ritual specialists, from a court near a Tibetan and Indian culture border area, to explain why Bon rituals are so overwhelmingly Indic and Buddhist in nature. We also need to free ourselves from the mindset, impressed upon us by later Tibetan traditions, that what was important at court was how monks, in particular Indian and Chinese monks, presented their varying doctrinal views, argued about them, and made efforts to establish them there. That is the agenda of later traditions, beginning at the end of the Imperial period, attempting to establish or refute historical *bona fides*. No doubt, there was some of that, and Buddhist history in Asia gives us several examples of such competition. However, when we look at what was of more practical concern to btsan-pos and Indian rulers in their day, that is, useful rituals, we can assume that such priorities were also held by local governments within the Imperium. When we understand that this was the practical value of Sanghas at courts, we realize to what extent they easily adapted local terminologies and categories, and even rituals, within reasonable limits.

Buddhists at another court could easily have used local ritual methods known by the generic term *bon*, just as Buddhists at the Tibetan court used at first the accepted local generic term *chos*, which had to be qualified, i.e., by *Sangs Rgyas kyi* 'Buddha's' to distinguish the basis of their methods. These methods may not even have been recognized by more normative Buddhists at other courts because they represented the local practices of a small group which had taken on peculiar characteristics. So, they categorized these practices to be foreign (the earliest occurrence in the *Sba bzhed*, below), and referred to their representatives as *bon po*s. The lower status that the btsan-pos would have held them in, if these teachings had come from a subject area, can be considered a reasonable explanation for why they did not, in fact, hold the important position at courts that Bon-pos have traditionally claimed.

In the study of Old Tibetan materials, much that we find—and this is hardly surprising—cannot be pidgeonholed on the basis of what we see today as normative Buddhism in Tibet. Foreign Buddhist monks arriving at court might not have recognized some of what they saw as a sort of Buddhism at first, and may not have liked some of it. For example, the texts studied by Imaeda Yoshiro in *Histoire du cycle de la naissance et de la mort: étude d'un texte tibétain de Touen-houang* are not conventionally Buddhist, yet are so pervaded by Buddhist concepts—as the author well points out on pp. 18–35—that they must be considered Buddhist documents.

During the Imperial period, the expression of a thoroughly Indic Buddhist vocabulary would have been inconsistent with the first priority of the Sangha there, which was to

serve the Imperium through its rituals in a language which was understandable by it. Indeed, no such wholesale replacement was accomplished during the Imperium. This is why, when we look at the matches in terms in one document (PT239; cf. p. 76) that Imaeda sees as evidence of the replacement of "non-Buddhist" with "Buddhist" vocabulary, it is as easy to see that an ancient vocabulary used by older Buddhists, now unrecognizable as such, was replaced by a later Sangha in the final movements towards what we see today as the normative, Indianized, Buddhist language (*Chos skad*) in Tibet. We fail to see, for example, how *dbon lob* (p. 76) could be considered the technical term of a "pre-Buddhist" Tibetan tradition when, in fact, it is simply a term of relationship. Likewise *'phru sangs*, "pure/clean grain", is a term also used in Buddhist ritual contexts as far back as we can go in Tibet. Indeed, every indication here is that we simply have the updating of language, part of an inexorable move toward a vocabulary reflecting greater dependence on the translation of Indic documents. This influence is, of course, well exampled in the first systematic Buddhist vocabularies (the *Mahāvyutpatti* and *Madhyavyutpatti*) and the language "reforms" attributed to Sad-na Legs and Ral-pa-can toward the end of the Imperium.

However, these vocabularies, oriented toward Vinaya and Abhidharma vocabulary, are also well known not to include a representative set of local ritual terms. We thus have no early evidence for a transition from a "pre-Buddhist" to a Buddhist ritual terminology. The rejection of various forms of animal sacrifice, which is traditionally presented as the basic objection to the earlier ritual system, also cannot be valid criteria to form a conclusion, since from then until today such sacrifices have, indeed, been performed by Buddhists—e.g., in the consecration of *stūpa*s—in the Himalayas.

For a preliminary analysis of the nature of Bon rituals, see Appendix II.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE INTERSECTION OF RELIGION AND POLITICS

The above discussions have not addressed several important religio-political terms and concepts which must be understood if we are to have a clear picture of the relationship between religion and politics in the Imperial period and later. As with the terminology concerning rituals, they are presented in isolation, and for much the same reason: We are uncertain about which broader context is most appropriate for them. As a matter of fact, here even more diverse subjects have been chosen, but they do have one thing in common: All are central to understanding the religion and politics of the Tibetans over a long period of their history. They either helped define leadership or enhanced the special status of the leadership. They are given in order of what one might reasonably consider their rank of overall importance to the formation of Tibet's religious culture.

Why Avalokiteśvara?

This question has not been given much attention in scholarship, yet it seems to be one of the most significant questions one could ask, given the form Buddhism has taken in Tibet.

The answer, not surprisingly, turns out to be political. It seems that not all Bodhisattvas are created equal, and Avalokiteśvara (Spyan Ras Gzigs) has a long, complex period of development which is permeated with political significance.

The history of Avalokiteśvara goes back to Chapter 24 of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*. In this text, he is a rescuer of those in danger and protector of the defenseless in a violent world. Although his development is not a simple matter, his later character is not inconsistent with this beginning. Rather, all else is a logical progression.

Perhaps the most important source for understanding this development is the *Karaṇḍavyūhasūtra* [KVS]. In this work, Avalokiteśvara is provided with an impressive array of titles befitting the highest monarch: Lord of Beings; Overseer of the Three Worlds; Lord of the Three Worlds (a term with a close equivalent in Śaivite belief); Possessor of

the World; Supreme Ruler Protecting the Earth, etc. (*lokeśasya jagatprabhu* and *jagannātha*; *trailokyādhipati*; *trailokeśvara* (cf. *tribhuvan*); *lokanātha*; *kṣitipādhirājā*), etc. Already in the two opening lines, he is an Overseer of All Worlds (*sarvalokādhipa*) and is addressed as the lord you go to for protection (*tam nātham śaranam gatva*). Not only does the vocabulary here contain traditional Indian terminology connected with sovereignty and religio-political status, it also lends a feeling of actual power which complements those qualities indicative of Avalokiteśvara's soteriological function found there, such as *sarvalokādhipa* (i.e., Lord of the Six Realms, hence his designation as Spyi Lha), as well as his metaphysical dimensions (*sarvadharmādhinātha*). It is clear that the author(s) of KVS understood that Avalokiteśvara cannot help beings in all realms unless he can project a powerful presence, the status of a ruler, in them.

The sum of this vocabulary, and the actions he takes, work to create a seemless unity of his religious-soteriological and political-administrative natures. In fact, even the rarified concept of a Cakravartin or traditional Buddhist 'Universal Ruler' loses its significance in this stream of epithets and titles, although references in the early sources to his behaving in the way of a Cakravartin are a typical circumlocution for having that status.[1] This is emphasized by the fact that Avalokiteśvara, pictured in Indian political vocabulary as Lokanātha, is a much more tangible figure than the Cakravartin, that ill-defined, transcendent ideal of earlier Buddhist literature, although they share some important characteristics, e.g., those surrounding solar symbolism (on which below). The impression is given that being a Cakravartin is a minor adornment of his, but it is clear that *creating* them—either through the six syllables associated with him (KVS, p. 223:…*sarvavidyādhirajendraścakravartī guṇākaraḥ / ṣaṭkapāramitāṃ nityaṃ sampūrayeddine dine*), or through his thousand-armed, thousand-eyed (Phyag Stong Spyan Stong) manifestation, where each of his arms becomes a Cakravartin, is one of his major and enduring functions.[2] Passages in the following sections provide more details about how this concept was envisioned.

We could speak about many other characteristics discernable in the developed figure of Avalokiteśvara, which certainly has many interesting facets.[3] To explain his popularity in Tibet, however, we need to choose from among those qualities that would have made him attractive to the leaderships of that country. (This resolves into: What encouraged Sanghas to present him as an attractive object of worship for rulers

and noble leaders?) Leadership and lordliness are his most important qualities. However, other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas also possess such qualities. What we need to see is clear evidence that these characteristics were intended to be applied practically, to this plane of existence. Fortunately, an important source does just that.

The first *Avalokitasūtra* (in Jones' translation of the MAHĀVASTU. II.245–248) describes how a Bodhisattva who has attained complete endowments goes to a spot of earth, possesses it, settles there, and destroys 'the Great Yakṣa': "That spot of earth, monks, becomes spoken of as a throne in the circle of the earth... And, monks, all who are universal kings decide upon that place and no other for a monument." The topic of a Bodhisattva taking possession of an area is central to this work, and is found as well in the second *Avalokitasūtra*. There we read (MAHĀVASTU.II.299) that Māra attempts to seduce "the Bodhisattva" with the distraction of becoming a Cakravartin, ruling "the four continents". The "Bodhisattva" (p. 301) asserts that, indeed, "I shall become a king of the whole world when I have awakened to the enlightenment, which is self-control, peace, and calm." In other words, it is not whether a Bodhisattva can, or should, be a Cakravartin, only that he must rule from an enlightened attitude. (Again, Bsam-yas comes to mind as an example of realizing the teachings in this Sutra.)

This Sutra has been cited not because it has anything in particular to do with Avalokiteśvara, although the use of the term *avalokita* in the sense of looking down or surveying may have anticipated, or been part of, the development of Avalokiteśvara's character.[4] Rather, it has been cited here because the *Mahāvastu* was aimed at traders and political elites and had widespread appeal in Central Asia. Scenarios such as those presented here would have made it especially easy for leaderships to connect the characteristics of Avalokiteśvara with the figure in these texts, both through its suggestive title and the nature of the Bodhisattva's actions there.

What Avalokiteśvara actually *is*, in the KVS and other literature on him, is unique for a Buddha or Bodhisattva. He is warming, soothing, enlivening, healing, and even bringing to positive fruition, i.e., ripening (*smin par byed pa/vipāka*) the former good works of beings in all world systems. (He projects the sun of his compassion on beings as rays of light. These also bring to fruition the good works of sentients at MA ṆI BKA' 'BUM.17v.) He also possesses great mobility, so that early on he is a being who transits from Sukhāvatī to this world to participate

in Buddha's teachings in this or that grove. Both these qualities—his mobility and his life-bringing power—make him a savior figure unparalleled in Buddhism.

What does this combination of rule and warming/ripening power point to? Frankly, it seems to be an excellent example of a barely disguised solar kingship. To understand this, we must appreciate the special relationship between Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara. This is not a simple matter, doctrinally speaking. The latter is, practically, the active manifestation of the former, figuring as his messenger or agent. He pervades the universe to ameliorate suffering and create the conditions for beings to achieve Sukhāvatī. These actions are continually presented as light reaching into such-and-such a pitiable condition. In other words, Avalokiteśvara as the rays of the sun acts in a way which shows a complementary relationship to Vairocana and Amitābha, who represent the *body* of the sun. (In other contexts his appearance is also likened to the full moon, and his presence to the sun and moon together. At other times, the sun and moon issue from his eyes. In such cases, he appears to be the source of light itself.) This explains the mechanism of his virtuous activities described in the paragraph above. The Chinese Buddhist teacher, traveler and translator Xuanzang (ca. 596–664), a contemporary of Srong Btsan Sgam-po, also understood that Avalokiteśvara was, in fact, the light of the sun, which means its "active" rays, as opposed to the solar body.[5] Later Tibetans as well understood this strong solar dimension of Avalokiteśvara's nature. Note MA ṆI BKA' 'BUM.69r3, quoting a rite in the otherwise-unknown *'Od zer rnam par bkod pa'i mdo*: *rigs kyi bu'am rigs kyi bu mo gang la la zhig gis tshes bco lnga la mchod pa chen po byas nas / nang par blangs nas lan nyi shu rtsa gcig gam brgya rtsa brgyad bzals brjod byas na 'Phags-pa Spyan Ras Gzigs Dbang Phyug gu lus gser gyi kha dog lta bu mtshan dang dpe byad bzang po brgyad cus legs par brgyan pa / sku las 'od zer brgya stong mnga' ba mthong bar 'gyur ro / phongs par gyur pa'i tshe 'Phags-pa Spyan Ras Gzigs Dbang Phyug yid la bgyis nas / lan brgya rtsa brgyad brjod byas na longs spyod dang ldan par 'gyur ro*... In other words, when the faithful makes a great *pūjā* to Avalokiteśvara on the fifteenth day of the month, and rises early in the morning, he/she will see a hundred thousand rays of light emerging from the golden-colored body of Avalokiteśvara. If they are in need, and have taken Avalokiteśvara to heart at that time, repeating his (six-syllable) mantra one hundred and eight times, they will be possessed of wealth.

Other passages in this work likewise emphasize the solar nature of Avalokiteśvara.

How might this complex of beliefs have been first communicated to Tibetans?

Some monks had come, however briefly, to Srong Btsan Sgam-po's court, acquainted him with the idea that a ruler such as he could become a universal human ruler, a Cakravartin, by worshipping Avalokiteśvara. (This is not to mention that such ideas could also have been introduced by Princess Wenzheng.) Since Avalokiteśvara actually creates Cakravartins, such worship could have been composed of nothing more than acknowledgment of the overlordship of that Bodhisattva. This would have been done through worshipping and honoring him. The ideas surrounding Avalokiteśvara from the beginning include the benevolent support, protection, aid and majesty that could only be provided by a compassionate but absolute ruler. These are truly attractive concepts for leaders. We need not pay much attention to old arguments that there is no evidence for such a relationship in Tibet; ancient evidence does exist, in the oldest parts of the Jo Khang.[6] One tradition (SBA BZHED.2000.32) also carries a dramatized version of a plausible event, a visit by monks from Khotan who had been told that the ruler of Tibet, Srong Btsan Sgam-po, was Avalokiteśvara. It contains sufficient evidence-against-interest to merit serious consideration as something other than a stereotypical Phyi Dar tradition.

As we examine later (but still early) Indic as well as Tibetan literature on Avalokiteśvara, we see that he is portrayed in them in ways which develop the above themes.

Indic *stotra*s center on iconographic details, and these mostly serve to reinforce his solar nature, often expressed by a connection with golden signs on his body and golden accoutrements. His role as a protector is present, but not dominant. Overtly political characteristics come in brief statements and frequent references to the Cakravartin (see below). Motifs we will return to in discussing a "mountain cult" include characteristics he shares with Śiva. These qualities include the use of the color white to convey purity and calm, and the wearing of the hide of a mountain animal (*kha ba'i ri dags lpags 'dzin pa*).

In neither the KVS nor other early Indic literature on Avalokiteśvara is there a reference to that Bodhisattva manifesting as lord of a particular country. Rather, as mentioned above, his role is to create Cakravartins.

However, his nature as the one who has descended to rule Tibet is known, even in 'non-Buddhist' literature such as the Gesar epic. (On Avalokiteśvara as sent down by Amitābha from Sukhāvatī to rule the "Snowy Realm", see Isaac J. Schmidt, *Forschungen zur Bildungsgeschichte der Voelker Mittelasians*, 1824, p. 195f.)

This tradition was promulgated in Tibet through versions and adaptations of the *Karaṇḍavyūha* which we may call the *Za ma tog* tradition.[7] Avalokiteśvara is prominently presented in this tradition as the lord of beings in Tibet (*Gangs-can 'gro ba'i mgon po*), which is especially significant because beings who are without a lord (*mgon med pa'i sems can*, a sentiment frequently expressed in normative Buddhist literature) are essentially lost, lacking the protection and security which allows for both material and spiritual (i.e., Buddhist) development. The thirteenth chapter of the *Bstan bcos Za ma tog* (column 270.7ff) covers the last teaching cycle of Śākyamuni. He prophecies that Avalokiteśvara will convert the *byang phyogs kha ba can gyi rgyal khams* and tells him to gather the material things (*zang zing*) and teachings that will benefit the Tibetans.

It is difficult to date the *Za ma tog* materials. Whether they are from early in the Phyi Dar is not consequential here because we do not lack other early sources. They have been cited first here because they carry the mantle of continuing the KVS tradition. Two of the most important early Phyi Dar collections of what I call "transitional" materials—those which contain vestiges of Imperial practices but were composed or collated quite some time after its fall—are the *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum* and *Bka'-gdams glegs bam*.[8] Both are dedicated to creating a vision of Avalokiteśvara that would fit the purposes of Buddhism in the Phyi Dar. They accomplished this by using phraseologies derived from the KVS tradition in combination with a role for *bla ma*s in society which is nearly absolute. Those who compiled these works were not interested in providing an accurate view of the Sanghas in service of btsan-pos, but in any case they were not in a position to; the total view had been lost. Likewise, neither contains the same sort of anecdotal material about this earlier period as the *Sba bzhed* traditions, apparently because the Sba (Old Tibetan Dba'as) clan had more interest than others in archiving or using the past. At least, they were interested in convincing us that they had accomplished that.

In discussions of the re-formation of Tibetan society, we must ask: What authority survived the fall of the Imperium? Weakened, local rulers in Western Tibet and elsewhere, and Sanghas made up of members

of noble clans, who were already referred to late in the Imperium as *bla ma*s. Idealized as teachers *par excellence* in early Phyi Dar literature, these figures were the value-carriers for Buddhists as they asserted their independence from local rulers, and their superiority over them. The sources above provide ample evidence that service to Avalokiteśvara was an important basis for that authority.

In the many stories framed on the previous lives of rulers and their Buddhist advisors in the *Bka'-gdams glegs bam* we find the development of motifs first seen in late Imperial documents. That these ideas are not discussed later in connection with the Tibetan courts shows that the early Bka'-gdams tradition considered it to be a high priority to reconstruct Buddhism in Tibet on *Indic* models. Perhaps they still retained a memory that the btsan-pos were not as Buddhist as they could have been, in their eyes. The fall of the btsan-pos had also shown them that leadership on a national level could disappear, but that even local rulers would always need Sanghas. The development of the *bla ma* and political ideas surrounding him in the *Bka'-gdams glegs bam* should be seen in this context. What this work gives us, in fact, is an extreme development of the role of *bla ma*s as leaders in their society, one so powerful that it still defines Buddhism in Tibet today.

Before addressing its use of *bla ma*, we need to look briefly at perhaps the most significant ideological development in the *Bka'-gdams glegs bam*, the idea of Dkon Mchog Gsum, i.e., the Triratna of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. In the *Bu chos* it is presented, via stories and allegories, as the protective and ruling nature of Buddhism, as refuge itself. The Imperium gone, it is the unique protection in the world (*'jig rten skyabs gcig dkon mchog gsum*); courts are erected for it (*dkon mchog gi pho brang dag… bzhengs*), and monks advise kings that all citizens should go to it for protection. [BU CHOS.22, 116, and 32 resp.] This concept of Dkon Mchog Gsum developed over some length of time, straddling the late Imperium and the early post-Imperial period; by the early Phyi Dar it was established. The motivation for it seems to have been the need of Sanghas to offer the leadership a catch-all concept encapsulating Buddhist values. As a source of security for rule, it could have been an alternative to the by-then faltering or past power of the btsan-pos and traditional institutions, such as the Sku Bla. This is why, in late Imperial and early Phyi Dar documents, Dkon Mchog Gsum is the phrase which comes closest to meaning "Buddhism" in general; *chos* by itself perhaps was still too closely connected with ritual to serve this need, and *Sangs-rgyas kyi chos* seems to have become

passé. (Note this passage at SBA BZHED.1982.54: *Sangs Rgyas dang Chos dkon mchog gi zhing khams / dge 'dun gyi bzhugs gnas / mdor na Dkon Mchog Gsum gyi pho brang*. Bsam-yas is described here as the "realm of the Buddha and the precious Dharma and the residence of the Sangha; in short, the *court* of the Dkon Mchog Gsum." Here we have a statement of Buddhism as government which encapsulates what the Dga'-ldan Pho-brang became.) Of all works in the early Phyi Dar, the *Bka'-gdams glegs bam* is the standard for describing, by example, how Dkon Mchog Gsum represents the totality of Buddhist, Sangha culture in Tibet.

In the *Bka'-gdams glegs bam*, *bla ma*s function as representatives of this Dkon Mchog Gsum. This is their function; what is their nature? We are discussing this topic within the discussion "Why Avalokiteśvara?" because in the *Bka'-gdams glegs bam* the motif that Avalokiteśvara is the ruler of Tibet is, if anything, presented more prominently than in the *Za ma tog* traditions, and this impacted the concept of the *bla ma* as well. Changes to the nature of this office represent the first of the special developments that helps us understand the later claims of the Dge-lugs-pa. By considering *bla ma*s themselves to be incarnations of Avalokiteśvara, they cemented a special relationship with that Bodhisattva, and this became an important basis for their status and their over-all polity.[9]

When we understand the special status that was accorded to the *bla ma* in the Bka'-gdams tradition, we are forced to conclude that it was not simply attempting to replicate an Indian Buddhist culture, since monks and teachers had probably never held such power in an Indian society or over its monarch as is presented in their literature. Rather, their goal was the synthesis of an *ideal* Buddhist society under Avalokiteśvara with Tibetan society as they saw it, one for their times, where the btsan-po as a functioning leader had ceased to exist. The Sangha had to establish power on its own basis, and this went along with assuming that all religious power in that society would be administered by them as agents of Avalokiteśvara.

There are points of disagreement between the *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum* tradition and the *Bka'-gdams glegs bam*, but what binds them together is the overwhelming figure of Avalokiteśvara. Otherwise, the former work takes a more "realistic" stance toward the *bla ma*. See in particular MA ṆI BKA' 'BUM.679r, which discusses the six sorts of lamas, and 480v, which recognizes three kinds of "external" lamas, the *bla ma*, the *rje btsun*, and the *slob dpon*. (The *rje btsun* recognizes the intention of

buddhahood in someone (480b4), while the other terms mean much as they do today.) The glorified status of the *bla ma* is not at all found in this work.

These traditions in the *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum* explain why, although worship of Avalokiteśvara was also popular among early Rnying-ma lamas, the idea of the *bla ma* sketched in the *Bka'-gdams glegs bam* did not take root in their tradition. Simply put, the strong connection between Avalokiteśvara and Srong Btsan Sgam-po is the central point of the *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum*, while the Bka'-gdams tradition intends the creation of a sacred government resting on *bla ma*s as the representatives of Avalokiteśvara in a variety of ways, including that of accepting his cosmological role as presented in documents from the KVS to the *Bka'-gdams glegs bam*. The *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum* emphasizes the stewardship of what it saw as an understanding of the inner nature of rulership under an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara, Srong Btsan Sgam-po.[10]

It is beyond the scope of this work to trace the development of the political dimensions of belief in Avalokiteśvara into recent times in any detail. It is likely, given the early presence and multiple diffusions of such beliefs, that it would be very difficult to trace such developments in a linear way. An exemplary beginning to such an effort has been undertaken by Ishihama Yumiko in "On the dissemination of the belief in the Dalai Lama as a manifestation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara". Her work centers on analyzing political activities in the mid-17th century which furthered this goal. The background provided by the above documents complements her analysis and the later texts she quotes. A few examples will suffice.

The *Mchod yon nyi zla zung gi khrims yig* of ca. 1653 opens with the statement that Tibet is the country associated with Avalokiteśvara, who has manifested himself there in various forms.[11] [ISHIHAMA.40] The practical rule and administration by the Dalai Lama as an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara accords perfectly with Avalokiteśvara's power in the opening of the KVS. This was already known to Ippolito Desideri, a Jesuit who was in Tibet from 1716 to 1721. [*ibid.* 43] The concept was expanded upon, i.e., extended backwards in time, partly on the basis of earlier traditions, by the Fifth Dalai Lama. He used it as a rationale for the legitimacy of the rule of the Dalai Lamas. [*ibid.* 45]

The appropriation of this tradition for the expansion of Dge-lugs-pa power in the seventeenth century is based, of course, on the claim that Srong Btsan Sgam-po and even earlier btsan-pos were *all* manifestations of Avalokiteśvara, even Gnya' Khri Btsan-po, a view already put forth

in the *Bka'-gdams glegs bam* (BU CHOS.514f). Therefore, claims that there had been numerous incarnations of him (*ibid.* 44, 47) is a position which can be demonstrated from early Phyi Dar literature. As a political statement, this creates a seamless tradition from the first btsan-po to the Dga'-ldan Pho-brang of that time which both ameliorates the status of the btsan-pos retroactively and, as so often in other cultures, includes them as Buddhist rulers operating in a Buddhist cosmological system, no matter what historical reality may have been. (Indeed, this is just another example of the method employed by Sanghas whereby rulers functioning in a non-Buddhist system are given a Buddhist status which is greater than, and stands outside of, that system.) Among these manifestations, of course, is 'Brom Ston, and the literature of the biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama (the *Du kū la'i gos bzang*) continues the tradition of the *Bu chos* in valuing that early Bka'-gdams-pa as a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara, except that now he is especially valued as a predecessor of the Dalai Lamas. This is already stated in the biography of the First Dalai Lama, composed in 1494. [*ibid.* 45]

In the development of his personal cult of Avalokiteśvara, the Fifth Dalai Lama utilized the well-known motif of the connection between Avalokiteśvara and the Potalaka, a mountain said by Xuanzang to have been in southern India, upon the top of which was that Bodhisattva's court. All the Fifth Dalai Lama actually did was add the interpretation that the Dalai Lamas now ruled from a court on that mountain. [*ibid.* 53] This is, however, significant, in that an incarnation is now claimed to be completely equal, in power and position, to the spiritual being he incarnates. Considering Avalokiteśvara's political nature, this is a powerful statement. Among other things, it allows the political leadership to claim, logically, that the Dalai Lamas are not only Cakravartins; they can create them. The first *Avalokitasūtra* and the KVS strongly connect Bodhisattva status with rule. The latter also lays the basis for rulers as emanations of Avalokiteśvara. The *Mdo sde Za ma tog* (70.4) states that merely copying the *Karaṇḍavyūha* creates the merit to produce a Cakravartin who rules the four corners of the world.[12] How much easier, then, for someone who *is* Avalokiteśvara? Indeed, for the Dalai Lamas to be acclaimed as that Bodhisattva gave them unparalleled value to other rulers. For example, they could invest both Mongol and Manchu rulers with a status otherwise unavailable to them, and they did so.[13]

Since the Rnying-ma tradition centering on Avalokiteśvara honored Srong Btsan Sgam-po as his incarnation and concentrated on

the development of teachings around him, we are not surprised to see some of their distinctive Phyi Dar beliefs in the *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum*. These include Rdzogs Chen terminology and rainbow body (*'ja' lus*) materials. However, we also find in this work little evidence of an organized polity, and their political thinking went in a direction very different from that in the Bka'-gdams/Dge-lugs tradition.[14]

In sum, Avalokiteśvara became the pre-eminent spiritual being in Tibet due to a combination of qualities revolving around protection and power. In post-Imperial Tibet especially, his capacity to provide comfort to individuals in difficult circumstances would have made his worship attractive. His value on a political level, however, was guaranteed by his long-standing nature as a ruler-figure, combined with statements interpreted as prophecies that Tibet was his chosen land to rule. The variable in this equation is his role as a solar figure. It appears here and there in all the literatures cited above, sometimes in a completely unambiguous way. Yet, how this element of his character was understood by many Tibetan Buddhists, and what importance they gave it, is not well understood.

Gtsug lag

Much effort has been expended to understand *gtsug lag*, a term which seems, from its occurences in the inscriptions, to be a concept fundamental to the function of the Imperium. For this reason, it has usually been considered to be a "pre-Buddhist" conception.[15] Previous scholarship has used a set of renderings from context to explain not so much its meaning, but what use of the term implies. This is in part because, in the inscriptions, it occurs in passages with no modifiers and little other guidance to its meaning. No certain conclusion about it can be drawn from these earliest occurences.[16]

Ariane MacDonald considered *gtsug lag* to be the concept which summed up Tibet's "pre-Buddhist" religion and which, in particular, described the religious polity of (what she saw as) the non-Buddhist Srong Btsan Sgam-po. (Rolf Stein, *op. cit.* p. 85, did not agree with this conclusion.) To accept this presupposes that we are cognizant that it, 1) Was fundamentally a religious concept; and, 2) Fit into a greater "ancient" religion, two ideas which continue to be connected with the term. There is no context to support either assertion,[17] and it is not

demonstrable on chronological grounds. We will see that *gtsug lag* is a more complex and flexible notion than this, even in its earliest uses.

Apparently, neither Stein nor MacDonald were aware that there exists a treatise, attributed to Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, in which that ruler describes *gtsug lag* during his reign. As stated in Chapter Two, in style and contents—though not, of course, in spelling and orthography—the BKA' YANG DAG is almost certainly a product of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's court. Whether he composed this document himself is irrelevant; few rulers actually wrote anything attributed to them. It is most likely that his Sangha wrote it for him, following his informed interpretation of Buddhism,[18] and that he approved of its contents. Let us take a brief look at a few of its important points.

One telling passage is on p. 98, column 2.[19] There, we learn that there were competing concepts of *gtsug lag* at his court. (We know that, in the early Phyi Dar at least, Tibetans considered that non-Tibetan rulers also possessed *gtsug lag*.[20] This shows that it was an even more flexible concept than that.) Khri Srong Lde Brstan considered Buddhism to be the essence of his *gtsug lag*. Actually, what he says is that the ritual practice of Buddhism (*Sangs Rgyas kyi chos*)—following our interpretation of the earlier meaning of the term *chos*—which did not include the sacrifice of living beings, was, for him, its essence. This agrees with his decree, studied in Chapter One, n. 84. He criticizes another *gtsug lag*, and rejects it as being a true *gtsug lag*. He bases this assertion, at least in part, on an accusation that those who believe in it are a danger to him. The inference to be drawn is that there is always a positive relationship between rule and a true *gtsug lag*. We have already seen that *gtsug lag* is not the exclusive possession of the btsan-po, even within Tibet. The phrase *'jig rten gyi lha dag gi gstug lag* in the passage in n. 19 is interesting for at least two reasons. One, Khri Srong Lde Brtsan has qualified this *gtsug lag* as applying to the spiritual beings of this world. Since his ancestors (*lha*) had already been elevated into a Bodhisattva lineage, he should not be referring to them. He could, however, have been referring to the *lha* of the noble clans who opposed him, which helps explain the plural *lha dag*. (This makes better sense than assuming that *lha* here would refer to some *deva* such as Hindu deities, because we know of no instance in which these beings, or even some "native" Tibetan spiritual beings, posed a threat to the btsan-pos.) The second reason this phrase is interesting is that it shows precisely the sort of adaptation of Tibetan concepts to a Buddhist universe that we should

expect to find in a court where the Sangha is attempting to place a local cosmology into its own system of beliefs. This passage reveals that Khri Srong Lde Brtsan has also defined his *gtsug lag* to include Buddhist concepts.[21]

In this passage Khri Srong Lde Brstan is telling us what his *gtsug lag* was composed of, at least in part. It does not mean that it was entirely Buddhist, only that he was guided by Buddhist principles in some ways. More significantly, it shows that *gtsug lag*, at least during the reign of this btsan-po, included whatever elements he chose, and that he rejected other claims to *gtsug lag* that he disagreed with. We have no reason to believe that previous btsan-pos viewed their *gtsug lag* differently. In the *Chronicle* we also find that the special *gtsug lag* of Tibet was dependent on the greatness of the btsan-po, i.e., that the success of his policies demonstrated good relations with the ancestral *lha* that guided him (DTH.118: *btsan po 'di 'i che byang nas / Bod kyi gtsug lag bka' grims ched po dang*…).

We could go on to trace *gtsug lag* into Phyi Dar literatures. This might allow us to bring out supplementary information about its original meaning. However, this would be difficult, because its meaning diversified at an early date. This seems not to have been due to the fact that its original meaning was lost, as is sometimes the case; rather, the term was freely adapted by Buddhists and others because it had always had a broad semantic range.[22] It is another example of what we call here a *categorical* term, meaning that, like *rim gro*, it was a cover term for a group of related concepts. In any event, we have no confidence that later interpreters knew of, or were concerned to preserve, whatever "original" meaning(s) the term had in the contexts of its earliest use. Therefore, later interpretations will not be brought forward here.

We learn, from its earliest occurences in the inscriptions, that *gtsug lag* was considered fundamental for the martial strength of the Imperium. On the basis of the following phrase, it seems to be the case that, if a btsan-po followed the customs of his ancestors, this resource would not be damaged ('Phyong Rgyas inscr., line 6–7, at LI & COBLIN.229: *yab myes kyi lugs bzhin / lha'i gtsug lag nï ma nyams*). We have described at several places already (Chapter Two, n. 61 in particular) that the ancestors in heaven bestowed some special power on their living generations. This was clearly seen by the btsan-pos to be, along with their origin in 'heaven' *gnam*, the basis for their special status. I believe that *gtsug lag* was the transmitted (for want of a better

term) power which consisted of a superior ability to protect, guide, and conquer that made btsan-pos valuable as leaders. It was seen to descend upon them from their ancestral *lha* in *gnam*. Whether it always did so, or could be revoked or severed, we do not know, but that seems to be implied from passages such as the above. In two of its occurrences in the inscriptions, it is connected with *dbu rmog*, the term that expresses the martial strength of the btsan-po and, thus, the Imperium. We may assume it occurs in conjunction with other subjects because these were also seen to have been related to Tibet's military and political power. It is interesting that Buddhism plays a role here. It occurs in connection with *chos* (LI & COBLIN.48, *chos bzang*; LI & COBLIN. 229, *chos gtsug lag*). We should assume that Khri Srong Lde Brtsan was a supporter of Buddhism from the inception of his reign, because he praises his father's accomplishments in the construction of temples. Therefore, we also should assume that *chos* here has a primary and secondary significance. The primary significance is as a general term for a ritual method which he approved of. Since he favored Buddhism at his court, the secondary significance, which may or may not have been obvious to *all* those reading the inscriptions at the time, was that the *chos* he was relying on was Buddhist rituals at court. Since the *chos gtsug lag* of the 'Phyong Rgyas inscription increased the *dbu rmo*g and the *brtsan po* in its glory (*byin*), we see a clear affirmation of the role of Buddhist ritual at court in service to the Imperium. *gtsug lag* was the basis upon which Khri Srong Lde Brtsan depended for his statecraft, through some process we are only vaguely aware of. It was composed of the guidance provided by his ancestral *lha*. Since these included those of his father, Mes Ag Tshom, also a btsan-po who supported Buddhism, we must assume that Buddhist values were encapsulated in both their concepts of *gtsug lag*, as it would have been for any btsan-po who was guided or advised by Buddhists at his court.

In all this we see, based on its earliest occurrences in documents composed by or for a ruler who supported Buddhism—Khri Srong Lde Brtsan—that *gtsug lag*, perhaps from its inception, was a term that included Buddhist practices. (This depends on two points: Is *gtsug lag* a term that goes back to the beginning of the Imperium? This has been the assumption, but there is no evidence for it. Also, if Srong Btsan Sgam-po had any relationship with Buddhism, he could also have included it in his concept of *gtsug lag*.) There is thus no reason to consider it a "non-Buddhist" concept, *or* a Buddhist concept. We return briefly to the question of whether the concept of *gtsug lag* actu-

ally existed before Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's reign. Even though a later inscription refers to "eternal *gtsug lag*" (LI & COBLIN.241, line 5, the tomb inscription for Sad-na Legs), this expression is used there for the first time, and may well have resulted from the firm belief of Sad-na Legs and the Sangha of the time that, in fact, all previous btsan-pos had been Buddhists, so they believed that Buddhist beliefs had always been a part of *gtsug lag*. This conclusion would have been logical for anyone reading the final lines of the 'Phyong Rgyas inscription, or lines from the full-length edict summarized in the Bsam-yas inscription, cited in n. 17, both from the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, in which he states that all btsan-pos, at least as far back as Srong Btsan Sgam-po, supported Buddhism. Also, by itself this phrase is no evidence that *gtsug lag* was literally meant to be an ages-old concept. In fact, the import behind the phrase *g.yung drung gi gtsug lag chen po* is more likely a reference to its eternal truth-value rather than that it was an element of Imperium polity considered to be beyond age.

The data presented here supports a functional interpretation of *gtsug lag* as the 'power' which lay behind the success of the btsan-pos. In accordance with the principal enunciated in Chapter One, that rulers normally would add religious beliefs to their courts that they felt would enhance their rule and power, Khri Srong Lde Brtsan centered on the elements of Buddhist teachings that he felt were most valuable in that regard. The idiosyncratic nature of his presentations of Buddhism in the full-length version of the Bsam-yas edict in Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag and BKA' YANG DAG show clearly that he faithed its fundamental teachings according to his own understanding. Since his father had also been a supporter of Buddhism, the *gtsug lag* that led both these btsan-pos (and perhaps earlier generations) would have contained elements of that religion.

We have already concluded that to assert that *gtsug lag* is a pre- or non-Buddhist concept is not provable chronologically, since its earliest attestations are during the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, a ruler who supported Buddhism. It is even arguable, though not important here, that the concept originated *during* his reign, as another way for him to assert that his support for Buddhism had the approval of all his ancestors.

Finally, *gtsug lag* is never presented in a context in which it is opposed to Buddhism. Indeed, it is difficult to understand how *gtsug lag khang*, the Tibetan rendering of the Sanskrit Buddhist term *vihāra*, one of the earliest Buddhist terms in Tibet—already used in the inscriptions—

could have been created if the term were in any way antithetical to Buddhism. We may never understand *gtsug lag*, etymologically or as a term of cultural reference, despite some good efforts in that direction.[23] However, thanks to edicts and documents most likely composed at Khri Srong Lde Brstan's court, we have a much better idea of what it meant in context as a principal resource of the btsan-pos.

A "Mountain cult" in the Imperium, and after?

The question of the existence of a "mountain cult" in ancient Tibet has been addressed here in connection with related topics several times.[24] In the scholarly tradition, particularly in anthropological studies, its present-day forms have often been approached, if implicitly, as the manifestation of a religiosity assumed to be of great antiquity. Some have asserted it to have been a part of the political theology of the government during the Imperial Period.[25] It is because of the implications of such assertions that we must exert ourselves to understand the bases of the known beliefs about mountains in the older political and religious beliefs of Tibetans. So far, there has not been much of an attempt to sketch these beliefs historically.

In addition to repeating the observation that there is nothing like a "mountain cult" in the inscriptions (including in their full-length versions as reported in Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag), we note that their most important ancient function seems to reside in the use of clichés about mountains used as metaphors for greatness, as in *ri mtho sa gtsang*, "high mountains and pure earth", a phrase which alternates in ancient materials with *yul mtho sa gtsang*, "high land and pure earth". Neither occurs in a religious context. Likewise, the name Gnam Ri Slon Mtshan, as explained even in the *Chronicle* (see Chapter One, n. 43), is a metaphorical expression, not a cryptic religious reference, as Ariane MacDonald has asserted. The greatest number of passages invoking mountains is in the *Chronicle*. Here, they are sometimes mentioned only for dramatic purposes, or to create comparisons of size and strength. There are other passages in the *Chronicle*, however, in which the relationship of the btsan-pos with mountains is presented in a slightly different light than we find in the inscriptions, and this may tell us something about the orientation of the authors of that document.[26] It is also worth noting that we have not a single text relating to a "mountain cult" or its rituals, or references to them, in Old

Tibetan literature. Such a complete absence where one would expect to find at least some traces of it, as, e.g., in connection with the basis of the rule of the btsan-pos in nearly all authentically old documents, or in public assertions of the nature of rule, such as the inscriptions, leaves one wondering what form it might have taken.[27]

A critique of the supposed relationship between the Sku Bla and "mountain cults" in Old Tibetan sources has been made in Chapter Two. It bears repeating here that Ariane MacDonald asserted (at "Une lecture…", p. 304) that the Sku Bla were the representatives of sacred mountains and that they were present in each region of Tibet during the Imperium. Although there is no evidence in truly Old Tibetan sources for any of the elements of this statement, it has been repeated (cf. F. Pommaret at "On local and mountain deities in Bhutan". *Reflections of the mountain*. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996, p. 54) and thus threatens to take its place as one more received tradition about religious beliefs in early Tibet which is an unsupported assertion.

In all fairness, there almost certainly was a certain status *connected with mountains* at that time. Special beliefs concerning mountains were ubiquitous in pre-modern Asia (cf. the data from China cited in the Pommaret article above, p. 55), and these often had significant political dimensions. A variety of social customs and rites in Tibet have surrounded them for centuries, but in such a diffuse form that they still evade categorization and even consideration as a coherent religious belief today (see remarks at Chapter Two, n. 47). This makes it all the more suprising that the closest connection btsan-pos have with mountains in Old Tibetan literature is in the reference to Lha Rï Gyang Do in the Rkong-po inscription, where Gnya' Khri/Khyi/Grï Btsan-po first set foot in this world (*myi yul*; cf. LI & COBLIN.198).[28] Of course, in this passage the mountain serves only as an intermediary point, its name symbolic of the transition from the world of the *lha* to the world of human beings. It has no other function in this passage, and there is no development of a tradition in this direction. More interesting is another ancient source, a court panegyric, in the *Chronicle*. In it, one Dba'as Dbyi Tshab Phang To Re praises Srong Btsan Sgam-po's virtues. This includes what seems a formalized comparison of that btsan-po's power to protect the *g.yang* (good fortune) of his courtiers with the way in which it would be protected by one's own *lha ri*.[29] Despite the fact that this is an abstract, poetic passage, it is in any event the earliest

statement, although not of Imperial age, we have of a link between success and the protection of an ancestral being, the *lha*, in connection with a mountain. Then, as now, such passages emphasize that the responsible and protective power in such relationships is the *lha* itself. And, again, there is no connection with btsan-pos either stated or implied here.

The principal sorts of rites in which mountains are involved in later times are *bsang*[*s*] rites, and they are also not mentioned in our earliest sources, although common sense tells us that they most likely already existed. In these rites, mountains are given a number of epithets and qualities, among which are *lha lam*, that they are a path to *lha*. Some are praised as *rgyal-po* 'kings', so that they have their own courts, e.g., other peaks as *rgyal-mo* 'queens' and *blon-po* 'ministers'. The latter are indicative of special status, but only in the same way as are the already-mentioned categories of spiritual beings, which also reflect long-standing social hierarchies. (Terms such as *rgyal-po* and *blon-po* are even used to reflect the level of power of other elements of daily life, e.g., some medicines.) Mountains are also honored in ritual texts with a variety of praises emphasizing their functions, such as protection from enemies. However, in ritual texts it is often difficult to distinguish flattering hyperbole—an essential element in Indic ritual which may have influenced these formulae—from what are considered essential qualities. Also, references to btsan-pos and anything else connected with the Imperium are nearly absent in *bsang*[*s*] texts.

In sum, while it might seem commonsensical that there was one great "mountain cult", or perhaps many local "mountain cults" in the Imperium, and that they would have been similar to those in Tibet today, in that they would be centered on clan identity, we have no clear evidence for such continuity. We also need to consider that *lha ri*, as so many other terms from this early period, may well contain at least an element of the symbolically descriptive and categorical (we also find *bla ri* and even *g.yag ri*, etc.), and thus may simply be (in many cases, at least) an honorific, metaphorical term meant to convey the idea of noble origins or special status accompanying an august entity. The passage from the *Chronicle* quoted above also begs the question, Did the imperial family partake in such a belief? We have no contemporary evidence about this, and we must take into account the fact that the imperial family (or at least the ones chosen to be btsan-po) was considered to be of a completely different nature than its subjects. Thus, assertions about the ritual role of mountains at the court of the Imperium have

been based on *argumenta ex silencio* as well as on a variety of untested assumptions. This includes assertions about the role of the ancestral clan mountains, *lha ri*, or the Sku Bla, in protecting the Imperium, on which see above and Chapter Two, n. 47. And, again, the drastic change in the landscape of Tibet from beliefs surrounding btsan-pos at courts to modern times, with its great loss of traditions, should give us pause about assuming continuities of belief and practice.

It is strange, then, that, compared with this early paucity of information, we encounter a plethora of concepts and beliefs in Buddhist documents from the late Imperium and early Phyi Dar literature. These have also grown over time, so that if we survey the idea of the "sacred mountain" in the Himalayan world and its various literatures, we are now inundated with motifs from a variety of sources. (For one overview, see the *Ri bo gangs can dang mtsho Ma dros pa chu bo bzhi dang bcas pa gtan la dbab pa Mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*. Dharamsala: Bod Ljongs Mnga'-ris Rig Gzhung Gces Skyong, 1984.) And this perhaps holds the key to how several concepts about mountains and "mountain cults" came to be projected into early Tibetan religion. In other words, this is another case, perhaps the most outstanding, where religious ideas often described as "native Tibetan conceptions" bear a strangely close relationship only to beliefs which are attested in some Hindu and Buddhist early literature, and which, in fact, are much better attested in later literature than in authentically ancient sources.

This development does, in fact, begin in late Old Tibetan literature, but only in Buddhist contexts. Let us examine PT239 and PT016. The former is a late Old Tibetan document (i.e., post-Imperial), the latter seems certainly to be from the reign of Ral-pa-can (r. 815–836). In other words, they may be roughly contemporary. It is in these documents that mountains are first given cosmic and religious significance, and it is not in the context of "ancient Tibetan beliefs".

PT239 contains teachings on the disposition of mountains in Jambudvīpa. It also incorporates Indic cosmological concepts with the newly-developed idea of *lha yul* (explained in Chapter Three), for which concept this text is central. When we factor in court vocabulary (*chos kyi rgyal tshab*; *blon po*), we seem to see a synthesis of Buddhist and Hindu doctrines with political concepts familiar to the members of the court of the Imperium.[30] This concatenation of doctrines is most interesting because it established the model for rule from a mountain fastness which is simultaneously a political court and a "heaven", with

all sorts of gods in attendance, just above Mount Meru. It may not be a coincidence that the traditional "mountain cult" of the Tibetans in later literature pictures very much the same thing, save that the *lha* in these are ancestral spirits.

Can we connect the ideas in PT239 with the btsan-pos?

The most significant religio-political documents from Dunhuang are the *Chronicle* and PT016/IO751. In the latter, we read in one passage (PT016.34v1ff) that Ral-pa-can sees the basis of his power in a Buddhist universe.[31] Conquest and power in the four directions through compassionate rule, having light which is like the sun and moon combined, and having the qualities of Mount Meru are all accorded to Ral-pa-can here as supports of his glory and political power. Being "like Mount Meru" is significant both by itself and because, in PT239, that mountain is described as being made of four precious substances. This sort of symbolism is connected in general with descriptions of courts and thrones, as well as with the seven precious substances from which the court of Avalokiteśvara is created.[32] In either case, in the PT016 passages cited in n. 31 we also have the first references to the motif of "the lord who is also a mountain", an ancient Buddhist and Indic motif, to which we shall return.

The seamless manner in which passages in PT239 and especially PT016/IO751, cited in n. 30 and 31, with their Buddhist and Hindu content, transit into the Imperial system, is fascinating. The passage in n. 31, which prefaces Ral-pa-can taking refuge in the Triratna (IO751.35v2), is followed by a nearly classic statement of Imperial ideology.[33] Among the interesting points is the use of *lha* in both contexts, in their "heavenly abodes", without qualification. What are we to conclude from this? According (again) to the "additive principle" by which rulers would use all resources available to them to enhance their rule, it would have been most practical for the Sanghas not to have denied that the btsan-po *'greng mgo nag gï rjer myï rjer lha las gshegs*, 'came from his ancestors to be a lord of men, to be a lord of black-headed people', as given in n. 31, but to have allowed Ral-pa-can to maintain his status in both cosmological systems. This means that the btsan-pos would also have been able to see their ancestors on Meru in relation to Indra, with their present court structure both preserved and enhanced: *de 'ï steng na chos bzang lha 'i 'dun sa na / lha 'ï dpang po Brgya' byin dang / blon po gsum cu rtsa gnyïs*, 'Above that, at the assembly-place of the *lha* of the Good Dharma, there is the Lord of Gods, Indra, and his thirty-two advisors.' Because of the proximity of Indic and Newari

courts, it is not difficult to visualize that *lha* possessed this dual usage for some long time during the Imperium. It was one way for Hindu and Buddhist cosmological elements to become embedded in Tibetan political theology at an early date. Again, the model of other courts and the easy manner in which *lha, blon-po*, etc., were matched with these concepts helps explain the introduction of "external" beliefs such as a Buddhist cosmology.

No matter exactly when it began, the tradition of the mixing of elements of foreign systems with Tibetan remained an established practice in Tibetan statecraft (and is an outstanding characteristic of 'court religion' *per se*). The Sde Srid or 'Regent' Sangs-rgyas Rgya-mtsho (1653–1705) essentially perpetuated parts of an ancient political cosmology in a "Vajrāyana" context. He describes a cosmos in part made up of regions (*khams*) and the earth itself (*sa*) under a heaven (*gnam*, a term rarely used in a Buddhist environment), with political entities (*rgyal khams*) and human beings (*mi*) in between. This schema is interesting both because it utilizes Tibetan religio-political terminology and concepts, and because it complements the "traditional" Tibetan cosmological hierarchy expressed in the triad *lha/gong mi/bar klu/'og*, which may be implicit here. For more details on this, see Kristina Lange, "Das Geschichtsbild des tibetischen Feudalstaates, 17.–20. Jh.", p. 215n, and reference to her earlier work there.)

We should not be surprised, given everything said above, that btsan-pos were not "orthodox" Buddhists. Utilizing additive principles at courts, they would have included Hindu concepts which may have gone back as far as Srong Btsan Sgam-po's reign, when the Licchavis were developing artistic and theological syntheses, or even before. We have a colophon, dated to the early ninth century, which speaks of a later btsan-po, almost certainly either Sad-na Legs or Ral-pa-can, as *dbang phyug dam pa'i mnga' bdag rgyal po dpal lha btsan po'i*…This strongly suggests an equivalence with Īśvara, i.e., Śiva. [R. Stein, "Saint et divin…", p. 244n.] This isn't the only indication we have that btsan-pos also courted identification or assimilation with Hindu deities, nor is it the only court at which this was done.[34] (Some cryptic epithets applied to the btsan-pos also point in this direction.) One important question that remains is, what were the mechanisms for a btsan-po to claim the special status of a relationship with either a Hindu or Buddhist spiritual being, and why, save for Bsam-yas, do we have no physical evidence of this?[35]

Śiva is, of course, the "mountain deity" par excellence of the Hindu

tradition, particularly connected with the Himalayas and Mount Kailas, where he commands groups of spiritual beings, and therefore is known as Gaṇapati. These groups (*gaṇas*) includes the Ādityas, the Rudras, and the Vasus, and they command the sky, the atmosphere, and the earth; this system is one example in which a Hindu cosmological concept matches the traditional tri-partite division of spirits in Tibetan tradition mentioned above. This defines the title *tribhuvaneśvara* as applied to both Avalokiteśvara and Śiva, and is yet another example of elements from neighboring religious traditions which would have been available to augment the status of a btsan-po. And, again, this is made especially feasible by the proximity of the Himalayas and Newari culture, with its combination of Śaivite (and Vaiṣṇavite) and Buddhist elements.

Once again, our basic problem in understanding whatever relationship there may have been between btsan-pos and mountains rests on an absence of contemporary evidence. It is interesting that, even in other cultures of about the same time where we have much more evidence for such a 'cult', the essential mechanism which would explain the equivalence of the ruler with the spiritual being and mountain remains a matter of some conjecture. This subject needs to be pursued for what it can tell us about how leadership in Tibet, in particular Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, conceived a Buddhist apotheosis, and how this might help us understand the nature of *thugs*.[36]

As we mentioned, data about the relationship between rulership and mountains increased in Phyi Dar sources. Without attempting anything like a thorough survey, we will cite here just two examples from important sources which allow us to see some ways in which the concept of *lha ri* was kept up-to-date.

As we have seen, there is no description in Imperial-period Old Tibetan materials of the nature or function of *lha ri*.[37] It is only in post-Imperial Old Tibetan documents and some Phyi Dar materials that they are placed in ritual or social contexts. We begin with a passage in the *Bu chos* which is a text in praise of 'Brom Ston's homeland. Here, we find an interesting juxtaposition of Tibetan, Indic, and Buddhist concepts upon which the status of the 'Brom lineage is based. It shows clearly the subservience of the *lha rigs* within a Buddhist power-structure, and thus is a motif which illustrates the transition of *lha*, and even *lha ri*, from a "pre-Buddhist" to a "Buddhist" environment. A more important point in this passage, especially in view of the central message of this work, is the relationship which it paints between the nobility of the clan, the

fundamental dual-nature of the *lha* as ancestral spiritual beings and Buddhist spiritual beings, and the high place the 'Brom clan occupied because of its origins.[38] In our second example, the role of the *lha ri* in the *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum* is meant to reprise data from the inscriptions as to the location of the descent of Gnya' Khri Btsan-po. However, the motif is brought up-to-date with references to a Yar Lung Lha Ri rather than Lha Ri Gyang Do. Other changes and elements introduced from later traditions can also be seen.[39] These again call into question the value of later tradition as an indicator of Imperial-period beliefs.

How these traditions dealt with the Imperial legacy is not surprising. The early Bka'-gdams-pas understood *lha ri* here in a traditional way, connected with the 'Brom clan as nobility. The absence of the btsan-po lineage seems to have had no impact. The Rnying-ma-pa narrative also does not attempt a plausible reflection of court tradition. In other words, neither tradition, despite the many differences in their approaches to interpreting life in the Snga Dar and its later value, shows any special knowledge of, or interest in, transmitting information about Imperial religion or culture. In agreement with other early Phyi Dar literature, when the btsan-pos are invoked, it is only in a formal manner that serves the needs of a post-Imperial, Buddhist world. To accomplish this goal, one of the first things that needed to happen was to assert that all the btsan-pos—except for Glang Dar-ma, of course—had been fervent Buddhist rulers, not just rulers who supported Buddhists at their courts. More importantly, they must all be emanations of spiritual beings, Bodhisattvas. This concept is also clearly expressed in the *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum*, so we can say that it was a general feature of the early Phyi Dar re-interpretation of Imperial realities. In this way, all other "worldly" court doings, including the ritual life of the Sanghas there, were rendered trivial or irrelevant and thus not considered worth archiving.

Eventually, the Bodhisattva concept—at least as it applies to Avalokiteśvara—is developed in Tibet in a way which overwhelms whatever added status the btsan-pos enjoyed from being recognized as incarnations. It is interesting that this is presented in such a fundamental work as the *Bka'-gdams glegs bam*. It is in the *Bu chos* that the Bodhisattva's role as protector is comingled with the function of a local lord based above a mountain, very much in the mold of Śiva.[40] This is founded on truly ancient Hindu beliefs expressed in an overtly political context. (Such an amelioration of Avalokiteśvara's nature into

a supreme being could only add status to the Bka'-gdams-pa lamas as his servants, and even emanations.) Here are passages from a Tantric song [BU CHOS.160.2ff] which give us two important characteristics of Phyi Dar religion and politics. One is as an early expression of Tibet's post-Imperial spiritual ecology, where that protective lord is an integral part of a highly spiritualized landscape such as we see in the Rnying-ma *sbas yul* literature. The other is how the Imperium (Spu Rgyal Bod) has been transformed into a fortress of Avalokiteśvara, who has assumed the protective role of lord, and even a 'lord who is a mountain'. (Avalokiteśvara as 'Lord of Glacier Mountains' is found in several passages in the *Bu chos*.) In this way, the power and grandeur of the btsan-pos has been completely supplanted. The song reads in part: *rdo rje'i glu bzhes pa ni / shar Rdo-rje Gdan gyi byang phyogs na / gnas Pu* [i.e., Spu] *Rgyal Bod ces bya ba yod / ri mthon po gnam gyi ka ba yod / mtsho dma' mo g.yu yi ma.n.dal yod / gangs dkar po she gyi mchod rten yod / spang ser po gser gyi lhun po yod / dri zhim po sman gyi bdug spos yod / tshon bkra ba gser gyi me tog yod / dbyar bkra ba g.yu yi me tog yod / kye gangs ri'i mgon po Spyan Ras Gzigs / gnas de na khyod kyi zhing khams yod / zhing de na khyod kyi gdul bya yod / ri padma stong ldan dbyibs legs pa / dus dgun gsum dkar po shel gyi mdog / dus dbyar gsum sngon po g.yu yi mdog / dus ston gsum ser po gser gyi mdog / dus dpyid gsum khra bo gzi yi mdog / mdog phun sum tshogs pa'i ri bo la / ltas khyad par 'phags pa'i mtshan ma yod*... *ri zur gsum brag gzhung gnam du mtho / nged mkha' 'gro'i rgyal mtshan bsgrengs pa 'dra / mi khyod kyi gnas der bstan pa spel / sa rtse brgyad lung ba phyogs su gyes / kye 'khor lo rtsibs brgyad pa 'dra /*... *kye gangs ri'i mgon po Spyan Ras Gzigs / mi khyod kyi zhing khams de na yod /*...

That Tibet belongs to Avalokiteśvara is stated in numerous other passages in the *Bu chos* and *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum*—in the latter, e.g., at 216r and 219r. The political value of the statements here is enhanced by references to the thousand-petalled lotus and the eight-spoked wheel, signs that Tibet is a nation ruled by a Cakravartin (or, what is the same, a land whose characteristics predestine that it is fit to be ruled by a Cakravartin). These signs point to Avalokiteśvara's role in creating and supporting them, and Tibet as a land ruled by them.

This *paean* to Avalokiteśvara is significant for another, related reason. It stands in contrast with the absence of even vague references to btsan-pos being involved in a "mountain cult" in Phyi Dar sources.[41] Considering the availability of such motifs in Mahayana Buddhist and Hindu/Śaivite literature which could serve as models, such construc-

tions would have been easy. Later Buddhists would have found such connections quite meaningful if they applied them to their idealized btsan-pos, as was done for leaders in some other cultures, particularly in Southeast Asia. That they were not so used, either in truly ancient or later literature, strongly suggests that no such set of values were ever ascribed to them. Portrayals such as we see in the *Bu chos* were part of a radical spiritual re-making of the Tibetan landscape in the early Phyi Dar. Traditions about mountains in Phyi Dar literature and in Tibet today are thus—not surprisingly—conspicuous by the paucity of their connections with, or references to, Imperial times.40

In the end, we really know very little about whatever role mountains may have had at the courts, or among the royal family, during the Imperium. The reference to Lha Rï Gyang Do in the Rkong-po inscription being unique, and without exposition, it may be nothing more than a particular location preceded by what is essentially an honorific title for 'mountain'. After all, an ancestral btsan-po could not be expected to alight upon a simple mountain. The remaining references, especially those from the *Chronicle*, are very general in nature, often occur in expressions used for emphasis, and point in no direct way toward a "cult" involving the btsan-pos. The most we can say is that some of these support later, wide-spread phenomena surrounding *lha ri* as they relate to noble clans. These latter *may* have had cults surrounding their mountains which were the geographical locators or considered the abodes of their ancestors during the Imperium. This is a view which can be dimly seen in authentically ancient Old Tibetan materials from Dunhuang, but none which are undoubtedly from the Imperial period. There is, likewise, nothing in Phyi Dar literature which preserves a memory of a "mountain cult" involving the btsan-pos in its own terms. Had there been, we certainly would have more data connecting btsan-pos with, for example, a Mount 'O Lde Spu Rgyal than we do, in fact, find.

Two impressions which immediately strike one when looking at the question of mountains in Tibetan religion over a period of time are: 1) There is clear data only beginning with post-Imperial documents. The amount of data increases dramatically, and takes on more definition, in the Phyi Dar. 2) There are striking similarities between beliefs about *lha ri* gathered in anthropological studies and modern texts on the one hand, and Hindu/Buddhist beliefs, especially those surrounding Śiva and Avalokiteśvara, on the other. Some *lha* and mountains have courts, and this agrees with Indic representations. *lha* and *deva*s are,

in fact, clearly distinct from the mountain, except in early Phyi Dar representations of Avalokiteśvara. Finally, according to the beliefs of some Tibetans, the souls of the dead ascend mountains, presumably heading toward a positive post-morten state. This is very similar to beliefs about Potalaka cited above in the *Xiyuji* of Xuanzang, who was writing near the beginning of the Imperium.

These observations render use of the term "mountain cult" problematic, for a variety of reasons. One is the consideration that Tibetan beliefs have been seriously influenced by, or even came into existence on the basis of, motifs surrounding Śiva and Avalokiteśvara. When these were introduced into Tibetan society is unknown, but their earliest clear manifestations in written form occur in the latest Imperial documents, which were composed by Buddhists. This requires us to examine, again, whether beliefs generally considered to represent "native" Tibetan conceptions are, in fact, ancient areal features, or parts of a system that has largely been introduced and adapted at a specific point in time, from late in the Imperial period through the early Phyi Dar.

The above arrangement of data also allows a general speculation about historical development. There may well have been some general beliefs about divinized ancestors of noble clans residing in the area of mountain peaks in the period before Tibetan literacy; about this we have no data. The fall of the Imperium may have provided the opportunity, or even impetus, for a crystallization of these beliefs because noble clans were both free to, and found it necessary to, establish an independent hierarchical structure to justify their leadership in a society lacking overall political structure. It is thus no coincidence that we find the earliest indications of this in the *Chronicle*, a document basically oriented to clan leadership, and why that work also contains no data explicitly connecting mountains with the power supporting the btsan-pos. This scenario helps explain why there seems to have been such a confluence of "native" Tibetan beliefs with those of Hinduism and Indian Buddhism which, as we have seen, flooded Tibet late in the Imperium and early in the Phyi Dar.

Cakravartins in Tibet

Let us now pass on to some ways the concept of the Cakravartin has been expressed in Tibet, and how it relates to topics discussed above.

First, a few general observations. Buddhists have always been adroit at orienting themselves toward centers of political power, i.e., courts. This was a principal reason Buddhism spread, both inside and outside of India. The mythological and literary sources which attest this are found throughout Indian and Central and East Asian Buddhist literatures. Many of these works were popular in Tibet, some in the Imperium and some in the Phyi Dar.[42] The variety of ways in which the Cakravartin is presented attests more than anything else its popularity *to Sanghas*. It tells us that Buddhist authors had great freedom in utilizing this ideal to make themselves attractive to courts.

Therefore, it seems advisable to approach the enculturation of the Cakravartin idea in Tibet through its own literature, rather than in trying to match what may have happened with the many ideal representations of a Cakravartin ruler that we find in Buddhist literature. Data cited here also show that it behooves us not to exalt one work over another in importance, as some have done. For example, the Fifth Dalai Lama and Sangs-rgyas Rgya-mtsho quote numerous canonical and non-canonical works based on their political contents, and it is difficult to find in these citations that one work, or position, had priority over another. The corpus of references to the Cakravartin is impressive because of its variety and near omnipresence as a political ideal. In some way, any Buddhist ruler *is* a Cakravartin, at least potentially. This was an attitude brought into Tibet by Sanghas, just as they had done elsewhere. As Hartmut Scharfe observes in *The state and Indian tradition*, p. 51, "Each king is potentially and ideally a *vijigīṣu* 'desirous to conquer the world' and aspires to be a *sārva-bhauma* '[king] ruling the whole world' or a *cakravartin*." This is the Indic version of the "Lord of the Four Quarters" motif.

This is why we also see such a variety of ways in which a Cakravartin may be created or consecrated. In addition to the materials cited below, we note the *Caityapradakṣinagāthā*, a Bka' 'gyur text. It teaches the many benefits of circumambulating stupas. These include acquiring wealth, being reborn as a ruler, and becoming a Cakravartin possessed of the seven jewels of that status. Quite different methods are taught in chapters 14 and 24 of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (the 1925 edition reprinted in three volumes in Delhi by Sri Satguru in 1989). Chapter fourteen has as its subject *cakravartipaṭalavidhānamaṇḍalasādhana*, i.e., becoming a Cakravartin through meditating upon a painted mandala. It is an exposition of a ritual, and contains no information relating to rule.

(Interestingly, several of its passages use terms and phrases very similar to those for Avalokiteśvara in the KVS.) On the other hand, chapter twenty-four is a politico-astrological document, with much detail on the relationship between *nakṣatra*s and rule, etc. Here, and in further chapters, varieties of Cakravartin are mentioned (e.g., Vidyācakravartin, Uṣṇīśacakravartin), which, while showing development of the topic, also show the subservience of rule to Tantric mechanisms, meaning that the goal is devalued in relation to depending upon a master of the method. Together with the scenario below, we have three quite separate traditions for achieving one goal, and these display three conceptions of that goal. In the first document, circumambulation is a mechanism which suffices by itself to produce results which are quite in accord with the literary models (e.g., the "seven jewels" of a Cakravartin). In the second, yogis are instructed as to which rituals will accomplish this goal. What would be the nature of their leadership? The *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* presents Cakravartin status as an example of a *siddhi*, the accomplishment a successful yogi may enjoy or bestow. Neither work envisages practical political consequences of their efforts. In the Bsam-yas tradition described below, the Sangha is necessary as an intermediary in both an oracular and priestly function for a rite meant to be held for a sitting monarch. This rite is eminently practical, and was aimed at rulers.

(We are not surveying later Tibetan literature on this topic, but a significant ritual work, a handbook of practical instruction, should be mentioned. It was written by Gser Mdog Paṇ Chen Śākya Mchog-ldan, 1428–1507, and is found in volume sixteen of his Gsung 'bum, published in 1975 in Thimphu by Kunzang Tobgey, columns 477–528. The *Khyab bdag 'khor los bsgyur rgyal ma* details an ideal lama-Cakravartin relationship based on Phyi Dar Tantric ritual culture. It guides a ruler through stages of spiritual development based on teachings in the *Guhyasamāja tantra*. It is not close in spirit to works such as the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, but as an early example of developed Phyi Dar religious polity, it should be studied as a bridge to later developments. What is perhaps most interesting about it is that it is not oriented toward Avalokiteśvara.)

These examples are a tiny sampling of resources available in the Indian and Tibetan Buddhist worlds for becoming, or being recognized or ordained as, a Cakravartin. It shows that both the situations for which this "ideal" is applicable, as well as the means to accomplish it, were manifold for any ruler wishing it. Which was chosen would have

depended on the culture and the particular knowledge of the Sangha at a ruler's court.

The Mahayana *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* [MPNS] gives us another template for Cakravartin belief and ritual. We discussed in Chapter Three the rite wherein Khri Srong Lde Brtsan circumscribed the plan of Bsam-yas. The same rite is described in this sutra. Here, however, it is mentioned with specific reference to empowering a Cakravartin, who is to dig a ditch around his capital city, i.e., the city containing his residence. (Again, we understand that Khri Srong was asserting that Bsam-yas was his residence, and that he was motivated to construct it, at least in part, because of questions about his legitimacy as discussed in Chapter Three.) The popularity of the MPNS in Central Asia, as shown by fragments found there,[43] makes it likely that such rites were known to Sanghas in the area. The rite at Bsam-yas is in part a *karṣanavidhi*, and thus includes an expression of belief in fertility sometimes associated with the Cakravartin ideal. It is also an ancient, Indo-European belief and rite connected with traditional kingship. When the incising by Khri Srong Lde Brstan and his children had reached a cubit in depth, there appeared in the soil white rice and barley, mixed together as if in an offering (i.e., a sort of *bali*). Nothing of bones, charcoal, or stones were found. However, pale, oblong pieces of *sa zhag* or "earth fat" did appear. This delighted Śāntarakṣita, who annointed Khri Srong with them. The monk then *consecrated* him with this *sa zhag* (*btsan po'i dbu la byugs*) and says, *pha la pha la si ti si ti*, which the btsan-po is said not to have understood.[44]

This is, of course, a politically significant narrative. Khri Srong Lde Brtsan had already been btsan-po for approximately twenty-five years when this rite was held. Therefore, something caused him to believe that he needed a change in status when he was already a mature, successful monarch. The building of Bsam-yas not only presented him with a refuge and personal expression of his faith, it was also a means for him to attain a categorically different level of rule, something beyond btsan-po. Since the only basis for great political power for a ruler supported by a Sangha at a court is achieving status as a Cakravartin, its attainment is implicit here.[45] Of course, a Cakravartin is not a self-made ruler; he must be recognized and consecrated by a Sangha. When a Hindu ruler is made a Cakravartin, a brahman must conduct a ritual (*vidhi*) of consecration (*pratiṣṭhā*), just as Śāntarakṣita had done for the btsan-po.

As stated above, Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's interest in this could have been a function of continuing questions of his legitimacy. Since the office of btsan-po was hereditary, such a question would not have easily gone away. It may also be that, as in another case, assuming this status gave Khri Srong a further opportunity to create of Tibet a united political entity.[46]

In both the Sri Lankan and Tibetan versions of this rite, the king is led through these ritual acts by one or more monks, who also interpret what the plough turns up. No ordinary monks will suffice for such purposes. In both sources, they are monks with oracular powers. In Tibet, such monks may have come from the *Bcom-ldan-'das kyi ring lugs*, the commission of supervisory monks who served the btsan-pos. According to the *Sba bzhed* and the *Za ma tog bkod pa*, such monks were to be looked upon as "the face of the Buddha" (*Sangs Rgyas kyi zhal*), so great was their spiritual authority. In other words, they are to be seen as the living equivalents of Buddha. They are also the highest sort of *mchod gnas* and possess the supernatural insight necessary to determine that the signs which have been revealed show that their ruler is destined to become a Cakravartin.

It is an interesting detail of agreement that in both these cultures the nobility of the kingdoms take part in the ploughing rite along with the ruler (see the *Sba bzhed* narrative rendered in Chapter Three, above). Since monks were also part of the nobility, this ritual, in Sri Lanka, India (presumably), and Tibet, was a complex political statement in which the entire hierarchy benefitted. Paranavitana saw this as "an integration of the religious ceremonies with the political organization of the kingdom" ("Ploughing as a ritual of royal consecration in ancient Ceylon", p. 38), and we saw above that such a rite at Rome was necessary to consecrate a political act with the authority of the spiritual being who ruled that people. Certainly, Khri Srong Lde Brtsan could have seen it having this benefit, also, for his kingdom. The founding of Bsam-yas was not simply a symbolic political act involving a btsan-po turning to his Sangha for support. It was understood that it was both going to elevate the status of the btsan-po and, perhaps, replace the current political system with a new sacred center for his court to reside in.

Creating a Cakravartin of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan was a layered event, less amenable to simple interpretation than might first appear. Some noble clans were willing to alter their old system of relationship with their btsan-po to see him—under the guidance of the Sangha, made

up in part of members from those clans—as a ruler in a new, grand cosmological system, with a place and power beyond that of a btsan-po. They *oathed*, as can be seen in the full-length version of the Bsam-yas inscription, to become a part of a distinctly Buddhist-oriented polity.[47] Does the fact that they took such an oath mean that other oaths they had also taken to support Khri Srong Lde Brstan had been superseded? Or, following the additive theory of rites at courts advanced here, was the btsan-po still in control of his government, but now connected with some of his noble clans through both sets set of oaths?

Perhaps Khri Srong Lde Brtsan fundamentally changed his power-base as ruler. If so, we have no indication that his successors followed his model. Rather, as we have seen from Ral-pa-can's reign (PT016), that btsan-po seems to have maintained a balance of power between symbols from Buddhism and the traditional descriptions of the power of a btsan-po based on the support of ancestral spiritual beings. His relationship with De-ga G.yu Tshal seems to have been more limited, or even of a different sort, than was Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's with Bsam-yas. Consideration of the legitimacy of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan again arises as a special motive for this. Unfortunately, we lack the contemporary data which could show incontrovertibly the polity Khri Srong Lde Brtsan envisioned in the construction of Bsam-yas, or how Ral-pa-can saw his relationship with De-ga G.yu Tshal.

Btsan-po *and* Rgyal-po

Few terms are as distinctive of Tibetan imperial polity as *btsan po*. That *rgyal po* also occurs in the inscriptions and later replaces that term requires us to understand how these terms relate to each other as best we can. Are they equivalent, complementary, or categorically not the same?

The etymology of *btsan po* seems clear, at least based on a modern understanding of the stem *btsan-* projected back in time. In fact, many truly ancient terms (in this case, again, it is a word shared among Tibeto-Burman languages[48]) still used in Tibetan have been rendered into modern understanding through the tradition of accumulated meanings (cf. *gtsug lag*), on which see definitions in Jäschke. The simple fact that the morphology of the terms has been consistent may convince us of a continuity in meaning. However, we also often find in modern lexicons a semantic breadth that indicates many shifts of meaning over

time. Uncritically accepting definitions from modern sources, even the standard lexicons, may hinder our understanding of their meanings in the earliest documents. (Note that, for obscure terms and phrases in editions and studies of documents from Dunhuang, the compilers and editors of BOD KYI and TUN-HONG.1992, as well as older studies such as TLTD and "Une lecture…", have almost always depended on definitions in modern lexicons. Continuity of meaning is assumed; however, it is almost never demonstrated. One can explore this topic by delving into the non-religious Xinjiang documents presented in OTC and OTMET. For the lexical challenges here, we have little help in the modern language, and that is understood to be because many such terms have simply disappeared from the lexicon. However, it is illogical to assume the opposite: That there is a continuity of meanings in those terms that have survived simply because they *have* survived, or simply because they are important political or religious terms. Continuity of morphology does not imply continuity of lexical content.)

For example, we have no idea whether *btsan*, a noun referring to a sort of spiritual being, existed as a concept during the Imperium. It may well have; we do not know. We do know that this category of spirits is well represented in Phyi Dar ritual, cosmological, and folklore materials, and, in part on the basis of modern lexicons, is now usually considered to be related to the term *btsan po*. A connection, quite common-sensically, has been drawn between a spiritual being with an irascible nature and the iconography of a warrior, and the title of the leaders of the Imperium. This scenario is, however, rendered less plausible because *btsan* was, in addition to being a title, also an element in the names of blon-pos and other nobility, an onomastic custom pointed out in Chapter Two, n. 58. If the quality of ecstatic warrior leadership was inherent only in the leader it would be easy to accept an equivalence, of sorts, between them. Perhaps the *btsan* spirits were never meant to be connected only with btsan-pos, but with anyone showing martial skill. More research needs to be done on this question.

It has already been asserted in Chapter Two that *btsan po*, in form an adjective, must originally have been used as a modifier. By the time of the Imperium, however—in other words, by the time Tibetans became literate—it had assumed the funtion of a nominal and was combined with *lha* in the most common appositional phrase used to describe the rulers of the Imperium. So, it is more than academic to speculate whether there was, even during the Imperium, a conception

of a special sort of *lha*, a warrior, *Berserkir*-sort of protective ancestral spirit whose foremost function was to provide well-being to his people through the wealth of conquest, and that this was the power behind the btsan-pos. Was there such a special sort of spiritual being, perhaps a *btsan*, who gave his power to the *lha btsan po*? Or is the opposite case more likely?

The btsan-pos presented themselves as inherently different in origin from human beings, so their warrior success may have been attributed to belief of a similar order by their supporters. This, in turn, could have resulted in the conception of a set of spiritual beings with these attributes.[49] Nevertheless, in the inscriptions no such reason is ever given as the special basis for rule by the btsan-pos, and the most common modern definition of *btsan*, "strong", hardly seems sufficiently distinctive to deserve being the epithet of a national leader who is already descended from *lha*.

These problematic points aside, one thing remains clear: *btsan po* disappeared along with the Imperium, except as it was retained in compounds meaning "imperial", etc., even today. It also was the unique title of the ruler of Tibet. It was not a term applied to leaders of other peoples or nations. This function was filled by the title *rgyal po*, which always had a more general application, a wider semantic range, to cover nearly any sort of ruler. This is why the opening lines of the Treaty Inscription of 821/822 read [LI & COBLIN.38]: *bod gyi rgyal po chen po 'phrul gyı lha brtsan po dang // rgya'ï rgyal po chen po rgya rje hwang te dbon zhang gnyıs //* "The Great Sovereign of Tibet, the Lha who has manifested, the Brtsan-po, and the Great Sovereign of China, the Chinese Lord, Huangdi, nephew and maternal uncle, the two". Given the Tibetan principle of the apposition of categories, *bod gyi rgyal po chen po* and *rgya'ï rgyal po chen po* are the broadest terms in these titles. They are meant to show equivalent levels of supremacy as rulers of their nations. There are, in the world, only one Chinese Emperor and only one *btsan po*.

There also is something of the administrator in the title *rgyal po*.[50] Although it comes from a stem, *rgyal-*, which has to do with being victorious, that verb has acquired a number of shadings of meaning over time, many connected with Buddhist concepts. Again, see Jäschke for some of these. Many of its uses refer to rule or conquest metaphorically, in religious technical terms. *btsan-* is, on the other hand, very little used in Buddhist technical terms (one example is *btsan sa*, a term

which arises in the early Phyi Dar). In other words, *btsan po* is a title with a very narrow semantic range. *rgyal-*, on the other hand, is used in terms such as *Rgyal-ba*, i.e., Jina.

Another idea inherent in *rgyal-* and its compounds is rule as a continuous or stable entity: *rgyal khams* 'kingdom'; *rgyal sa* 'capital' (already in the *Annals*); *rgyal sras* 'prince'; *rgyal rabs* 'dynasty'. In contrast, *btsan-* seems to relate to only one individual in each generation, and those who preceded him in that same office. Unlike *rgyal*, it is used in very few terms that express extended meanings of its central concept. The aspect of continuity may be significant. *rgyal po*, used from an early period in all sorts of compounds coming from Indic and Buddhist sources, including rendering *cakravartin* (*'khor lo bskor ba'i rgyal po*), was more amenable to represent stable rulership—rule as an office—as a concept. Again, it was a categorical term, not a term centered on the personality of a leader. Such terminology may have come into existence because monks at court had difficulty working with the concept of an ecstatic war-leader to establish a Buddhist polity. Over time, they seem to have succeeded in molding a concept that was more to their liking, a btsan-po who was equally a rgyal-po in terms of polity, as is clearly seen in PT016. This was most likely accomplished already by the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, because in his inscriptions we see both titles used in ways that reflect, as far as we can see today, a status of some equality. The Rkong-po inscription, asserted to be from the reign of his son, is, on the other hand, a good example of local politics. Here, the office of btsan-po is paramount, because the inscription deals with the relationship of the Kong Kar-po with btsan-pos concerning what was probably their participation in a comitatus. The term *rgyal po* does occur, but again in the more general way of applying to some other monarch. Here, as an example of that general nature, is a pledge by the btsan-po that no one else will be appointed ruler over the Kong Kar-po: *rkong kar po'i rgyal por gzhan myı gzhug par*… [LI & COBLIN.199].

The narrower semantics and application of *btsan-*, and the fact that it went out of use immediately with the fall of the Imperium, tells us that it fulfilled a highly specialized function. As leader of a comitatus, a single btsan-po who could not fulfill his oath-sworn duties could have caused the entire structure—the set of united tribes and clans—to break up. (Is this what happened under Glang Dar-ma?) Once the aura of his success was lost, his society could feel itself bereft of leadership, and that entire manner of government could disappear. Eventually there was in

Tibet a well-known but still poorly-understood period of chaos and re-organization, after which a variety of different governments arose. The Tibetan example is thus at one with others in which the original comitatus system, with its war-leader, did not long survive the establishment at its courts (in both Central Eurasia and Europe) of the representatives of highly-organized religions—Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Chinese religions. The descendants of Chinggis Qan provide good examples of this. And when it disappeared, it often did so quickly. This certainly describes the disintegration of the court in Tibet.

This evidence allows us to conclude that the titles *btsan po* and *rgyal po* are, and were meant to be, categorically different. The former was surrounded by a set of beliefs which went hand-in-hand with warrior status and a place in a comitatus as a governing system. The origins of the latter are to be found in all probability in diplomatic thinking at the court of the Imperium. It seems never to have been embedded in the same belief system as the btsan-po, and its more general application made it a concept amenable to Buddhist interpretations at courts from its first use.

One passage most epitomizes several points raised here. In addition to containing perhaps an opaque reference to the support of Avalokiteśvara in high glacier mountains, we find a "Lord of the Four Quarters" motif and elements of Hindu cosmology. Most importantly, we have the only statement about what actually distinguishes a *btsan po* from a *rgyal po*. Their difference, it turns out, is based in the nature of Tibet itself, in the fact that the btsan pos behave in a manner which is consistent with their position as *lha* manifested, and in the fact that the *lha btsan po*s, because they have not violated the customs of these ancestral *lha*, are superior to other rulers (*rgyal po*). This superiority is manifest in their strength (*brtsan*). This passage, at IO751.36a1–3, reads:…*gnam chen po phyogs bzhï'i mnga' bdag / 'phrul gyï lugs dang 'thun ba ni / Bod kyi Lha Btsan-po / 'phrul gyï zha snga nas bzhugs te / yong yang / chu bo chen po'i glang / gangs ri mthon po'i rtsa / yul mtho sa gtshang ba'ï gnas na bzhugs pas / 'phrul gyï lha btshan po ni / gdungs rabs 'grangs par yang / lha'i lugs ma mnyam* [i.e., *nyams*] *ste / rgyal po gzhan bas / che zhing brtsan bar mngon.*

The distinction between *rgyal po* and *btsan po* can have a practical application for the interpretation of Old Tibetan materials. For example, PT1047 has much information about the relationship between btsan

pos and the Sku Bla, as well as other beliefs. However, does it really represent values at the court of the Imperium? As we have said, although it would be easy to assume this is the case, we must remember that, in addition to containing much foreign vocabulary, which indicates that it is a translation, it cannot represent direct court realities because it mixes *rgyal po* and *btsan po* in the same contexts. In other words, in most cases a more general term—meant to apply to all sorts of rulers anywhere—was used. The situations presented there, then, could be meant to apply to rulers anywhere, and even when the Sku Bla are mentioned, this could be in connection with some broader set of beliefs. If this is so, how do we sort them out?

Nongs

There are terms of obscure meaning found in Old Tibetan documents which also occur in Phyi Dar materials. Those that carry—at least potentially—significant religious information need to be investigated. It is tempting to believe that they tell us about religious values from the time of the btsan-pos and that they perhaps also represent "pre-Buddhist" beliefs. As we have stated above in various ways, this is always difficult to assert with any confidence because: One, we really cannot say when Buddhism became an influence at the Tibetan court, since later traditions, our main sources on this, are not reliable; and, Two, because of the uncertain chronology of many early documents. These points lead us to assert that only beliefs explicitly mentioned in the *Annals*, most of the inscriptions, and documents such as PT016/IO751 may be assumed to reflect those of the court during the Imperial period. These beliefs cannot then, however, be assigned to any great antiquity or "pre-Buddhist" belief system unless there is further evidence for this, as, e.g., that the terms for them have cognates with similar meanings in other Tibeto-Burman languages.

This last section analyzes one such term, the verb *nongs*. That it is expected to carry religious implications is clear from its earliest use in Imperial-period texts. This word is related to another verb which may help us understand its meaning, *gnong*[*s*]. (This is its common spelling in classical written Tibetan.[51]) *nongs* has one certain meaning in Imperial-period Tibetan materials, and that is the same meaning it has today in Jäschke: It is an honorific verb, applied to the nobility and some members of the royal family, with the meaning 'to die'; cf.

the *Annals*, PT1288.135: *Pyï Khri-ma Lod nongs*. (It is significant that this verb was *not* used for the 'deaths' of the btsan-pos. They did not, after all, die. Rather, as discussed above, they returned to their point of origin, which we have referred to as 'heaven', upon death, expressed in the phrase *dgung du gshegs*. The importance of this distinction is apparent in the last citation here.)

nongs has a different, but perhaps related, meaning in compounds in Imperial-period Old Tibetan documents. The meanings of these compounds center on the concepts of fault, crime, and disagreement. This usage of *nongs* is also found in political documents from the earliest Phyi Dar period to the present, as well as in standard lexicons.[52] For example, *nongs* is found in literature from the *Annals* through the early Phyi Dar. In the latter period, it also occurs in a variety of political contexts, including the breaking of oaths or other serious misdeeds. (Khri Srong Lde Brtsan uses *nongs* as the opposite of *legs* several times in materials ascribed to him at DPA'-BO.1985.375f.) A clear example of the appropriation of court concepts into a Buddhist environment—at least during the reign of Ral-pa-can—is that the commission of *nongs* required expiation through the intervention of a confession (*'thol*, CWT *mthol*), as is attested in PT016/IO751. Today one can find in collections of Rnying-ma materials *nongs bshags* texts for confessing misdeeds.

This is thus another important early religio-political concept for which we have yet only a vague understanding. *nongs*, like *sku bla* and *gtsug lag*, can only be understood from its contexts. The question is, do later uses of this term reflect how it was used at Imperial courts, or are they the reinterpretations of later monk-authors, beginning with PT016, meant to fit their political agendas? We also note that our attempt to understand this term has been based, as almost all others, on later lexicons.

We find further examples in post-Imperial documents which give us an extended meaning of *nongs*: Committing a fault of a serious nature may be connected with death. In some cases, ritual execution is an implied consequence. One can imagine this to be the result when important leaders—perhaps even btsan-pos—broke their oaths or made disastrous miscalculations. In a more passive way, any untimely act, circumstance, or even bodily feature can be regarded as a *nongs* and might result in the (untimely) death of a leader. We must emphasize again, however, that all occurrences in which we find btsan-pos connected with *nongs* in these uses—as in the examples below—come from post-Imperial documents. As we said, btsan-pos did not die—*nongs*

is not used alone as a verb with reference to them—nor is this verb connected directly with them in Imperial documents. Unless we find in an Imperial-period document a statement such as that only a death considered to be 'natural' resulted in the btsan-po returning to 'heaven', while forms of death not considered 'natural' were thought to be the result of *nongs*, for example, we can make no direct link between btsan-pos and these later uses. This disconnect leads us to see such a belief as one example of the re-interpretation of beliefs about btsan-pos in the Phyi Dar, as we will see.

Our first examples of *nongs* with the meaning in the above paragraph are from early post-Imperial sources. The *Chronicle*, line 6, ascribes Gri Gum's unfortunate name to be a *nongs*; on line 131, a revolt due to improper *srid* and *chos* is recognized by a leader as a *nongs*.[53] These are examples of untoward political events taking place during the Imperium explained as the result of *nongs*.

Gri Gum's fate is not the only case in which the death of a btsan-po was connected with *nongs*. Note this passage about Ral-pa-can in the *Lha thog rgyal rabs* (Palampur: Sungrab Nyamso Gyunpel Parkhang, 1971, p. 31): *rgyal po dgung lo so drug pa lcags bya la sku la nongs pa bgyis te zhal ltag par bstan nas bkrongs*. This example of political meta-language tells us that, in the thirty-sixth year of the Rgyal-po (a term that would not have been used for the ruler during the Imperium), in an iron-bird year, a fault was comitted with respect to his *sku*. Following an inspection, it appeared on the nape of his neck, and he was executed.

These uses of *nongs* in the old spelling suggest that they are stories based on ancient, even Imperial, traditions. If so, they reveal a sacramental dimension to the body of the btsan-po. Both Gri Gum (spelled Dri Gum in the Rkong-po inscription) and Ral-pa-can, we are told, died because of *nongs*. Although they were different in nature, the causality is clearly the same. The point of one story is that Ral-pa-can committed some error of rule, because of which a 'fault' was seen on his body, and it was deemed necessary to execute him. One is tempted to see here a tradition that, being the completely different sorts of beings in origin that they were, and that they possessed the *sku* of the Imperium, some connection between the two could be divined on their bodies.

Such a "fault" or "crime"—to go back to the other early meaning of compounds with the element *nongs*—could be intentional or not. In keeping with long-established Tibetan tradition, numerous negative events befall human beings because of some pollution. Incorrect ritual practice, such as a defect in performance or not making an offering,

could be an important cause of *nongs*. (This may explain concerns about correct *chos* 'ritual' in early sources.) These are faults (*skyon*) which result in pollution (*grib*) that must be addressed. This is suggested in the *Chronicle* reference, above, and the quote at n. 53. We thus have a later tradition of the vulnerability and mortality of the btsan-po, with its potentially disastrous effects on the Imperium, and this was connected with ritual practices. It would have served later Sanghas as an explanation for why the btsan-pos were flawed and—perhaps—why the office of btsan-po disappeared. Of more timely significance, such tales would have been an object lesson for leaders to ensure that they saw the benefits of giving their courts into the care of a Sangha. (*nongs* with these colorations of meaning is found in both PT016 as well as the *Chronicle*. It is important to remember here that the latter contains Buddhist elements, and was almost certainly composed shortly after the fall of the Imperium—it sometimes uses *rgyal po* for *btsan po*, which does not occur in materials from that period—when speculations about what caused its fall would have been current.)

Were these court beliefs, or later Buddhist developments? Remember, monks are the only religious figures connected with the practice of confession rites at court. It would have been in their interest to create later traditions in which the btsan-pos were seen as fallible and dependent on the Sanghas. This is the logical conclusion we can draw based on a chronological study of the early occurrences of *nongs*.[54]

The above passages describing *nongs* are recorded only in post-Imperial sources. Could they have been based on the memory of a use of *nongs* as it was used in much earlier sources, such as the *Annals*? Perhaps, but in a post-Imperial world, it may have been considered more important to understand *nongs* to explain the deaths of the btsan-pos. This process began early; in the old but post-Imperial PT1047 we already learn that other sorts of portents could be read on the bodies of the btsan-pos.[55]

nongs as equated with *doṣa* (fault or offense) was already of interest to Sanghas and lamas late in the Imperial period, for it was soon the subject of confession rites. This facilitated the spread of its meaning as 'fault', and helps explain its popularity in a variety of Phyi Dar Buddhist literatures—doctrinal, ritual, mythological, didactic. However, in these uses we see little that offers an understanding of other, perhaps non-Buddhist meanings *nongs* may have had during the Imperium.[56] The early interest of Buddhists in this term best explains the direction of its development.

Let us recapitulate the situation, following the sources chronologically. In the earliest, Imperial-period sources (e.g., the inscriptions and *Annals*), *nongs* clearly means 'to die'. However, as we know, this verb was not applied to btsan-pos. Imperial and later tradition likewise has a verb, which is either a variant or is closely related, the fundamental meaning of which is 'to commit a fault/crime'. In documents composed shortly after the fall of the Imperium, this state of being at fault is also asserted for the btsan-pos, that it is manifest in some way, visible perhaps only to those especially-trained to see it. (At PT1287.479, someone judges an action to be *nongs* beforehand, and it is not undertaken.) It is in this context that we may have found the original connection between *nongs* meaning 'to die' and 'to commit a fault'.[57]

Whatever else we see in the old traditions, we come to one conclusion which is likely true, at least from the point of view afforded us by the post-imperial texts: *nongs* was an important concept because it was a nexus between improper behavior and members of the aristocracy at court. It seems reasonable that their illnesses and deaths were interpreted by some as signs of improper actions on their part, either in errors of judgment, deeds of disloyalty, or in actions such as the execution of rituals they performed, or were performed for them. After all, we have seen that their world was populated by spiritual beings and potential human enemies who could benefit from errors at court. This also explains how the nefarious or disloyal actions of others could have adversely affected the *sku*, i.e., the well-being of both the btsan-po and the empire. According to a variety of early post-imperial sources, a number of punishments, including entombment while still alive, exile, or execution, were then meted out.

Conclusions

Material covered in this chapter and throughout the work emphasizes that neither the Imperial nor the post-Imperial religion and government of Tibet were organisms with a central doctrinal engine. Thus, although monks in both periods were the chief composers of documents and carriers of religio-political values, they did not produce a synthesis of beliefs and practices. Our interpretation of their written evidence is complicated by the fact that the role of Buddhism significantly changed over time. In the Imperial Period, Sanghas did their best to serve btsan-pos by presenting them with various resources, both ritual and

(to a much lesser extent) doctrinal. Members of the Sangha were from noble families, and they existed in a complex nexus of interests and beliefs which involved whatever their clans' ancient religion and beliefs had been, mixed with beliefs surrounding the btsan-pos and their own Buddhist faith. Early in the post-Imperial world, after the final dissolution of the Imperial *pho brang*, monks naturally gravitated to their clan and home areas, and, infused with a new independence, centered their efforts on creating a vast amount of Buddhist translation literature, especially Vinaya materials, upon which to construct a culture based on the leadership of Sanghas. This, in essence, is how Buddhist culture in Tibet developed from early in the Phyi Dar until today.

This helps explain why the gap in knowledge between these two periods of Tibetan history is so great. The sting of loss is difficult to calculate from this distance, but the rapid disintegration of what had been a great empire would have created among them, as well as others, the need for one great symbol of security. This was provided in the concept of Dkon Mchog Gsum. And, although Avalokiteśvara had been significant in the earlier period—perhaps *because* he had been—this savior-figure became paramount in importance in that world. His character incorporated elements of other dominant spiritual beings in the area with significant political dimensions, Śiva and Viṣṇu, so he fit easily into established patterns of rule-by-deity that already existed in Newari and various Indian cultures. This complemented a persona which was already rich with assertions of actual rule over earthly realms to make of him a figure perfect to serve as the basis for a transcendental rule administered by his representatives, the Sangha, who were, in fact, his emanations. To be part of an effective religio-political system, he needed representatives who, in addition to being his emanations, were in a position to assert his unique authority. Who better to do this than direct descendants of the monks of those noble families (e.g., the 'Brom clan, succeeded in a different system by members of another noble clan, the Khon) who had served the btsan-pos?

In other words, this system succeeded in the early Phyi Dar not simply because *bla ma*s were, according to the *Bka' gdams glegs bam* tradition, emanations of Avalokiteśvara, but because they had become more directly the leaders of Tibet than they could have been when serving the btsan-pos. With their new status, they had little motivation to investigate or understand exactly how Buddhism had functioned under earlier leadership. They *were* motivated, however, to cast Srong Btsan Sgam-po (and eventually all btsan-pos) as an incarnation of

Avalokiteśvara for their own purposes, no matter what past reality may have been. This allowed them to claim a leadership role that continued what they now asserted was the basis of power for the btsan-pos. Propaganda about the last btsan-po, Glang Dar-ma, was created to explain a fall from greatness by connecting his character with the fate of Tibet, and perhaps to instruct about the weakness inherent in the office itself, as opposed to the trustworthiness of the Sanghas. The *Sba bzhed* operates from such assumptions.

It is thus a matter of some irony that this usually extremely conservative society cast off nearly all the elements of its earlier rule. Most of its important concepts were lost; others, such as *gtsug lag*, were redirected to be meaningful to the new society. The Bon-pos, themselves a Phyi Dar phenomenon, were left to claim of ancient traditions what they wanted because these were of no value to the Chos-pa monks of the Phyi Dar, although earlier monks at courts had certainly understood them in their context. Not a single Buddhist source from the Phyi Dar, even the excellent data contained in some histories, enlightens us much about Buddhist culture at the Imperial court. (Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag's dependence on the *Sba bzhed* traditions, which deal only with Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's reign, shows the paucity of such sources.) Concurrent with the supremacy of Avalokiteśvara, the Tibetan people were provided with a new view of themselves as the offspring of that same Bodhisattva and a demoness and told that, before Buddhism had taken over Tibet, they were little more than savages. Most lamas who have communicated with foreign scholars and students have faithed this story, and it has helped provide—as no doubt intended—a replacement for the largely unknown story of the political and social history of Tibet during the Imperium and the place of Buddhism there. The interest of Western scholars and later Tibetan tradition in the activities of foreign monks at the courts of the Tibetan Imperium is also largely a product of ignorance about the Imperial period. Stories about them served the interest of later Sanghas, which had become involved in doctrinal disputes whose roots cannot be verifiably traced to the Imperial period. In true Buddhist fashion, other faults proceed from ignorance, so when most Phyi Dar monks and lamas accepted the importance of foreign monks at courts, they were mostly following traditions established in the histories and *chos 'byung* written in their own time.

Methodological observations

Given the modest resources that date to the Imperial period at our disposal, it would seem that our only hope for greater understanding is to return to them, but with an approach that is as value-neutral as possible. To create a valid diachronic study, students of religion face the challenge of analyzing present and past realities on their own terms. Assertions of continuity must be critiqued in the face of observed changes in terminology as well as in institutions and beliefs. Over and over again, religious vocabulary has shown tremendous flexibility in the face of such changes. In addition to the experiment with *nongs*, we have also seen the changes that *bla* and *gtsug lag* have undergone over time. We thus must take a critical approach to written sources. We can do this by maintaining a healthy distance from those claiming to speak for modern traditions who maintain that there is an unbroken continuity of belief and practice from the earliest times to the present.

The Zeitgeist of earlier studies in the West, partially based on these later Tibetan traditions, was to draw a clear distinction between Buddhism and some 'native' Tibetan religion which was opposed to it. This was a position created, again, by Phyi Dar historians, but it also seemed reasonable to Western scholars who accepted that Central Asian peoples such as the Mongols and Turks had a primordial, 'native' religion, represented by a figure they called a shaman. Again, whether or not any of these peoples, all of whom were composed of confederations, ever had such a unified 'native' tradition is doubtful. At any rate, there is no evidence for this in sources on the ancient Tibetans, and none in documents verifiably from the Imperial period.

Such attitudes involved, as a corollary, trying to distinguish rulers as Buddhist or non-Buddhist, and to search for systems behind these positions. This mindset came from the same Zeitgeist. It turns out that when we examine *gtsug lag*, etc., in a more objective manner, we obtain a glimpse into a certain political and religious ethos which perhaps by nature belonged neither to 'non-Buddhists' nor the monks at court. In addition to not being able to divine a religious system among the constituents of the Imperium, the few terms and concepts used by its court that we understand at all well do not allow us to draw a conclusion as to whether the btsan-pos and their comitatus shared a common belief system. All we are left with is the asserted superiority of the btsan-pos. If we can understand other early terms, such as *sku*

bla, we can perhaps piece together a broader context within which the btsan-pos functioned.

Central to any such effort is a serious analysis of the relationship between religion and practical politics at the courts of CECC confederations. Rather than assuming that there *must* be a core set of religious beliefs that the leadership, the court, and the general population shared, it is worth exploring the idea that the belief of the leadership in its own superiority was an end in itself. We have no evidence that the disparate elements of a confederation were required to sacrifice their religious beliefs and customs while faithing the superior status of the leadership. This means, practically, that there is no need to posit a single religious substrate at the courts. This, in turn, reduces the likelihood that a group such as the Bon-po represented a central belief system at the courts of the btsan-pos before the coming of Buddhism.

A final observation about *nongs* and *gtsug lag*. One difficulty in defining such terms with clarity is that, as *rim gro* and *glud*, they are best explained as categorical terms. Rather than referring to one specific set of well-defined qualities or circumstances, they cover a variety of related concepts, in the one case faults, errors, or crimes; in the other, abilities or talents. Since we spent some time discussing the founding of Bsam-yas, we may add to this list *sa dpyad*. Usually described as geomancy, it is a cover term for a variety of methods from a number of different cultures which originally had slightly different applications. For example, at Bsam-yas the geomantic methods came from Indic Buddhist traditions. Other *sa dpyad* practices seem to be of Tibetan origin, while some are certainly of Chinese origin. The concept thus varies widely in its origins, methods and purposes. As with many other rituals connected with the courts, they may have been gathered into a rubric whose meaning was designed to refer to its practical application (e.g., *rim gro*). It would be difficult, not to mention unnecessary, to come up with a consistent or rigorous definition under such circumstances. Practitioners, such as monks or court advisors, would present rite *X* as being expected to result in effect *Y*, for example. More research is needed to determine whether the concept of a 'categorical term' is accurate and helps us understand the nature of some of ancient Tibet's religious concepts and the world-view they operated in.

Endnotes

[1] Avalokiteśvara and the Cakravartin are connected in the KVS through their close associations with gold. On the likely sources of this belief, see Appendix I.

The concept of the Cakravartin seems to have undergone a separate development in its association with Avalokiteśvara, who is praised in the KVS as Trailokyādhipati, Trijagannātha, Lokeśa, ruler of the four Lokapālas. (The latter epithet makes him a 'Lord of the Four Quarters', on which more below.) The idea that gods may incarnate on earth is an ancient one in India and Nepal. Thus, Sanghas would have had no problem supporting Avalokiteśvara as a ruler or as a Bodhisattva, a creator/protector of rulers on earth with a close relationship to both earthly rulers and that Sangha. The titles here support these functions, and certainly aided later developments in Tibet, on which below.

[2] The last two paragraphs are closely paraphrased from WALTER.M.2004. The reader may consult that article for an expanded discussion of the points made briefly here.

Many inferences may be drawn from this exalted picture of Avalokiteśvara. A very practical one, from the point of view of court religion, is how such claims provided an excellent entree into that realm and a step up on a potential rival. The development of the cult surrounding Maitreya/Metteyya in Sri Lanka, for example, shows several similarities to those of Avalokiteśvara, including a synthesis of the Cakravartin ideal of kingship with Bodhisattva status and identification of rulers with Maitreya. (One may see a similar development of Maitreya in China.) Eventually, a cult of Avalokiteśvara also arose there which competed with the Buddha Maitreya to be the supporter of Singhalese kings. (See *Anāgatavaṃsa desanā = The sermon of the Chronicle-to-be* as edited by John C. Holt. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993, pp. 3–9.) The transition from requiring a monarch to become a Cakravartin by his own efforts to herald Maitreya's coming, to becoming a Cakravartin as the natural result of being a direct manifestation of Avalokiteśvara, is a logical development in the effort to provide enhanced status for rulers and their courts.

In terms of chronology as it applies to Tibet, it is important to realize that Avalokiteśvara's "Thousand Armed, Thousand Eyed" (Phyag Stong Spyan Stong) manifestation may be earlier than usually believed, because it is found prefigured in a 100,000-armed, 11-faced form mentioned in an early chapter of the prose KVS. For an analysis of Phyag Stong Spyan Stong, see Lokesh Chandra, *The Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1988).

The early date of the KVS, first translated into Chinese in 270 by Dharmarakṣa, allows quite sufficient time for the spread and development of its political teachings. The same goes for the other important sources of beliefs about Avalokiteśvara, such as the 24th chapter of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* (although known to be a slightly later interpolation), the verse KVS, and numerous minor works in the Bstan 'gyur.

[3] See Constantin Regamey, "Motifs vichnouites et śivaïtes dans le Kāraṇḍavyūha". *Études tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou*, pp. 411–432. For an overview of the basis for associating Avalokiteśvara with Śiva and Viṣṇu, see Pierre Arènes, *La déesse Sgrol-ma (Tārā)* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1996), pp. 69–72. On the subject of his relationship with Hindu deities we may add Brahmā, as asserted in *The Thousand-Armed Avalokiteśvara* by Lokesh Chandra, *op. cit.*, *passim*. Special attention in the latter work is given to Lokeśvara as a form of Brahmā, q.v. p. 29ff.

[4] See John C. Holt, *Buddha in the crown*, p. 33.

[5] *Histoire de la vie de Hiouen Tshang* by Huili, p. 141.

Good surveys of the nature of Avalokiteśvara and his connection with Amitābha and Mahāsthāmaprāpta can be found in de Mallmann, *Introduction à l'étude d'Avalokiteçvara*, (Paris: Civilisations du Sud, 1948), John C. Holt's *Buddha in the crown*,

and Julian F. Pas, *Visions of Sukhāvatī* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), p. 5ff. One should keep in mind that, as with all religious motifs, understanding a concept as complex as Avalokiteśvara involves going beyond tracing historical connections or thinking in terms of orthodox philosophical categories. It requires delving into how his characteristics were only *integrated* in later writings; the origins of many were not part of that earlier tradition. (One example is the non-standard identification of Amitābha as the father of Avalokiteśvara in the *Gopālarājavaṃśavalī* noted by Wright in his translation, *The history of Nepal*, 1877; reprint: Kathmandu: Nepal Antiquated Book Publishers, p. 288. On this see also John Locke, *Karunamaya: the cult of Avalokitesvara-Matsyendranath in the Valley of Nepal*. Kathmandu: Tribhuvan University, 1980, p. 288.) Pas certainly seems correct in asserting a separate solar tradition for Avalokiteśvara (p. 6), one that makes his relationship with Amitābha and Vairocana problematic, but it is clear that this was no bother for those conditioned to believe in numberless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Literature on Avalokiteśvara, for example the KVS, presents him in ways that clearly duplicate the nature of Amitābha in the Smaller *Sukhātīvyūhasūtra*. *Stotra*s on him in the Bstan 'gyur (Sde-dge version, vol. 72) picture him as having images of either Amitābha or Vairocana as his *dbu rgyan* (diadem) and actually manifesting as the sun: *'gro rnams smin mdzad nyi ma rab tu snang* (*ibid*., p. 252). In an interesting motif concerning the blessing-by-light of the Bsam-yas area at SBA BZHED.1982.39, the light which Avalokiteśvara shines down on Brag Mar is described as "the light of Amitābha". In this motif, too, the former is considered the agent of light of the latter.

Vaiṣṇavite elements in the KVS are significant because Viṣṇu is another deity with a strong solar nature. Some of these elements have been examined by Konstantin Régamey in "Motifs vichnouites et śivaïtes dans de Kāraṇḍavyūha", *op. cit*. n. 3. Many Avalokiteśvara images possess non-normative elements which are syncretistic with Viṣṇu. For one example, see Shashi Asthana, "A rare image of Avalokitesvara from Eastern India". *Purātattva*.20.1989–90.113f. We may conclude from data in the KVS and other sources that the solar nature of Avalokiteśvara is something special, as is his relationship with Amitābha or Vairocana. It reveals little to examine these in terms of a doctrinally normative Buddha-Bodhisattva pairing.

Avalokiteśvara is, as described above, most especially the rays of the sun, which is a unique quality in Buddhism. In addition, already in the verse KVS—especially in the fourth chapter—he is basically the creator of all beings and all worlds. Everything is an emanation of his light, as is the case with Viṣṇu as the creator of all beings in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, another work in which gold is a prominent descriptive element. Gold, as we have seen, is especially associated with all things surrounding Avalokiteśvara. (See also Appendix I for more details.) Therefore, the light given off by gold is especially symbolic of his nature or presence. If we combine these known traits with the report from Gardīzī (data for at least as early as the ninth century) that the btsan-pos wore cuirasses of gold, and that these had images of spiritual beings on them (according to the *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum*; cf. Chapter Two, n. 1), we can easily imagine that these were meant to be symbolic of the presence of Amitābha *or* the action of Avalokiteśvara. Btsan-pos may have considered themselves under the latter's protection, or even to have been his creation. Individual soldiers could likewise have been seen as "rays" of the sun, which was Avalokiteśvara as the btsan-po. This may help explain why Tibetan soldiers until recently wore those golden cuirasses on formal occasions. (Again and again we meet passages in Avalokiteśvara texts, e.g., the *Amitāyurbuddhānusmṛtisūtra* and the KVS, that all sentients are the creation of rays of light which emanate from him. The idea that all beings were created from Avalokiteśvara was also known in seventh-century China. On this, see Antonino Forte, *Political propaganda and ideology in China at the end of the seventh century* (Napoli: Instituto universitario Orientale, 1976, p. 226.)

This thinking should be considered in connection with an important motif in KVS, that of the defeat of Māra, the "Dark One", opposed by the forces of light. This motif often invokes imagery of *armor and battle*. The first *Avalokitasūtra* is also centered on

the defeat of Māra, who has a great army and strength. The entire work *could* be seen only as a metaphor for spiritual practice, save for the clear references to rulership and occupying land in preparation for the reign of a Cakravartin at MAHĀVASTU.247f. Understanding the battle between Buddha and Māra as an actual event in the Buddha's life is, in fact, not uncommon in the Buddhist tradition. It is a central concept in both the Theravada and Mahayana MPNS, the *Mahāvastu Avadāna*, and other textual sources, and is well-represented in iconography, on which see Priyatosh Banerjee, "An unidentified repouseé gilt bronze medallion from Chinese Turkestan", at *www.rbiblio.org/radha*. To complement this motif, the imagery of overwhelming light-force combined with rule is one of the most dominant elements in literature on Avalokiteśvara.

The methods by which the leadership of a society attempted to create a closeness to Buddhist spiritual beings is a constant, although details vary among them over time and place, of course. We have the examples in China researched by Antonino Forte. We have the nobility of Silla attempting to reconstruct their society into a Buddha land by perfecting their behavior so that Maitreya will incarnate into it (see Hee-soo Jung's *Kyŏnghung's commentary on the "Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra" and the formation of Pure Land Buddhism in Silla* (Ph.D. dissertation, Madison, WI, 1994, p. 369). Finally, we have the Tibetan nobility modeling for statues of Buddhist spiritual beings at Bsam-yas (SBA BZHED.1982.39). Can we see rulers accompanied by the protective power of a Buddha or Bodhisattva that would make greater sense of the cuirass of gold?

First of all, we have to understand that the association sun: gold: Avalokiteśvara is based on a set of widespread ancient and areal beliefs so popular that, as with some characteristics that were taken over from Śiva, his faithful felt compelled to appropriate them. Among these is the belief, expressed in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, that the weapons of the gods were fashioned from rays of the sun (H.W. Wilson's edition and translation, reprinted by Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2002, p. 228). Solar deities frequently have martial functions, the Sol Invictus of the Romans. Such a form was known to Central Asian Buddhists at Qızıl, and the armor worn by a "sun god" there, including the cuirass, was most likely modeled on that worn by Sogdian soldiers. The author of a study on these representations does a good job of pointing out the generic nature of many images in Central Asia—that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish images of Mithra from Sūrya, for example. Included in this study is one image of Sahasrabhuja Avalokiteśvara from Dunhuang with lunar and solar gods at the top of the painting, probably a demonstration that the sun and moon proceed from Avalokiteśvara's eyes, as is taught in sources on him. See Tianshu Zhu. "The sun god and the wind deity at Kizil", in *Ērān ud Anērān: Webfestschrift Marshak* (2003), a book posted on the Transoxiana web site; cf. pp. 5 and 9 especially.

That we have little iconography of an armored Avalokiteśvara is not a great problem here. Since Avalokiteśvara bestows conquest and protection, it would not be necessary, or even appropriate, for him to wear armor. He causes victory by dispersing his light and by creating Cakravartins, not by his military action or leadership. In this way, as in many others, Avalokiteśvara is much more than simply a solar deity or a specialized deity of another sort.

Finally, a later section in the long poem quoted in this chapter from the *Bu chos*, which centers on Avalokiteśvara as "Lord of the Glacier Mountains", relates to both Avalokiteśvara's role as creator of Cakravartins and as protector: *kye 'khor lo rtsibs brgyad phab* [*phub*] *pa 'dra / mi khyod kyi*[*s*] *mi mthun gcod pa'i rtags / thang chen po'i gseb na ri chung nyal / mtsho chen po'i nang gi nya mo 'dra*… [BU CHOS.161.2–4] "Oh! (Avalokiteśvara!) Your eight-spoked wheel is like a shield!* People are a proof that you cut off unfavorable conditions! Small mountains dwell in the recesses of the vast plains, like fish within a great lake…" The comparison refers to the spiritual significance human beings have as creations of Avalokiteśvara. The opening line is the significant statement here: The appearance of an eight-spoked wheel in the sky is a common characteristic of a land ruled by a Cakravartin. This sign is like a shield

because it signals that Avalokiteśvara provides security for the Cakravartins he creates to rule that country. (The *Bu chos* consistently puts forward an occult government for Tibet, with Avalokiteśvara at its head. This became the cornerstone for legitimizing the Dalai Lama and the Dga'-ldan Pho-brang as his sole representatives.)

* Or, like a canopy. See n. 1 in this chapter for the significance of the eight-spoked wheel as a sign of the country of a Cakravartin ruler.

[6] Recent research shows that the evidence is reasonably good for the existence of Buddhism at the court of Srong Btsan Sgam-po, and this is in itself impressive, considering how little physically remains that can be incontrovertibly connected with his reign. The results of Amy Heller's work ("The Lhasa gTsug lag khang: observations on the ancient wood carvings", paper presented at the Lhasa Valley Conference, Nov. 26–28, 1997, p. [2]) involves showing the strong presence of Licchavi elements in the early portions of the Jo Khang. A sculpture at the base of a pillar there, a form of Avalokiteśvara, is an example of Licchavi art, showing strong iconographic connections with this Newari dynasty. Avalokiteśvara was especially popular in their art, and Srong Btsan Sgam-po had given their court sanctuary during his reign. Not coincidentally, the statue in the Potala said to represent Srong Btsan Sgam-po's tutelary is that of Lokeśvara. Its style is also quite Licchavi, and Ian Alsop was able to connect the model for this image with Licchavi (Newari) craftsmanship and models in Kathmandu Valley. On this, see his "Copies in Tibetan sacred art: two examples". *Oriental art*.56.2.2000.4–13 and references there; Amy Heller, "Buddhist images and rock inscriptions from Eastern Tibet, VIIIth to Xth century, Part IV". *Tibetan studies*. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997, vol. 1, pp. 385–403; see esp. p. 387f, and David Weldon, "Tibetan sculpture inspired by earlier foreign sculptural styles". TJ.27.1–2.3–36. Alsop is convinced of the truthfulness of the Tibetan tradition connecting this image with Srong Btsan Sgam-po, but the more important point here is that all relevant data so far *does* support, rather than refute, Tibetan traditions about that ruler and his interest in Buddhism.

We return to the observation made in Chapter Two, n. 35, concerning scepticism about the long-standing Tibetan tradition of Srong Btsan Sgam-po's relationship with Avalokiteśvara. We have already cited the "letter" of Buddhaguhya, which, if from late in the Imperium, as it well may have been from its phraseology, attests the fame of their connection. Srong Btsan Sgam-po's support of Buddhism is also asserted in Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's inscriptions (cf. the Rkong-po inscription cited above, as well as the full-length version of the Skar Chung inscription quoted at DPA'-BO.1985.409), which would be difficult to do if it were known to be contrary to reality. Even the *Sba bzhed* traditions, which I believe contain some materials earlier than most in the *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum*, and which otherwise have no special interest in Avalokiteśvara, assert that Srong Btsan Sgam-po was a *sprul sku* of Avalokiteśvara (SBA BZHED.1982.2). It also helps explain the importance of Amitābha at Bsam-yas—which may also have been motivated by a desire to perpetuate the early Tang tradition acknowledging Srong Btsan Sgam-po as his incarnation—and this opens the way to investigating whether Avalokiteśvara was important in Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's reign as well. On this latter point, see the ritual described at n. 36 below.

In reality, there is no *negative* evidence concerning the nearly universal Tibetan tradition equating that Bodhisattva with Srong Btsan Sgam-po. This is a tradition much more widespread, and earlier, than such obviously later creations as equating Tibetan bstan-pos with Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī and Vajrapāṇi. So, despite the fact that modern scholarship often repeats the received tradition, as was recently done by Matthew Kapstein in *The Tibetan assimilation of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 149 in particular, the burden is actually on its critics to refute it with evidence as strong as that which supports it. The mere fact that later tradition greatly inflated the person of Srong Btsan Sgam-po—as well as several other btsan-pos—is no evidence for what actually happened at his court. A kernel of truth often lies within later exaggeration.

For a survey of Dunhuang materials on Avalokiteśvara, see Sam van Schaik, "The Tibetan Avalokiteśvara cult in the tenth century: evidence from the Dunhuang manuscripts", in *Tibetan Buddhist literature and praxis: studies in its formative period, 900–1400*. Leiden: Brill, 2006, pp. 55–72. Evidence for ninth-century cults brought forward here complements data in the present work. Likewise, at n. 35 there we find support for the worship of Avalokiteśvara in early Tibet intermediated by monks from Khotan. This supports the motif from the *Sba bzhed* quoted above, and it underlines the need to examine this venue further, especially given the time-line for the development of Avalokiteśvara, e.g., beginning especially with the sixth century.

In fact, we know, objectively, nearly as much about Srong Btsan Sgam-po's relationship with Buddhism as we do about that of Ral-pa-can, since PT016 is couched in ritual language and contains very little that we can identify personally with that btsan-po. Indeed, the many references in that document to Ral-pa-can being guided by *thugs rje chen po* allow us to speculate that he also was considered an incarnation of, or functioned according to the teachings of, Mahākaruṇika Avalokiteśvara.

One of the problems with identifying the religiosity of the btsan-pos is our view of the reality of court life. As long as we go on believing that the 'Buddhist' btsan-pos had an overwhelming, exclusive faith, we will continue to search for proportionate examples of it, such as Bsam-yas. However, that monastery and the rationale for its creation were unique. And, of course, Bsam-yas was also a political statement. When we understand that Buddhism was in the hands of the btsan-pos at their courts, and not the other way around, the inflated claims made by later Tibetan traditions will cease to guide us, and we may achieve a realistic approach to its study.

[7] These texts include the *Mdo sde Za ma tog* and the *Bstan bcos Za ma tog*. They were published together in 1978 in Delhi by Khasdub Gyatsho Shashin. The former is a loose translation of the prose version of the KVS, which is generally considered to be earlier than the verse version published by Lokesh Chandra. The latter is a Tibetan composition which develops themes from the Indic text. It is in natural, literary Tibetan, and no data exists for its antiquity. However, the lack of any reference to the political ideas of the Dge-lugs-pa from the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama and Sangs-rgyas Rgya-mtsho suggests some antiquity.

[8] There are numerous fine studies on their composition and transmission. Here we restrict ourselves to works which outline their contents. For the *Bu chos* we have Dieter Schuh in *Tibetische Handschriften und Blockdrucke*, Teil 8 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1981), pp. 1–16, and for the *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum*, Manfred Taube in *Tibetische Handschriften und Blockdrucke*, Teil 4 (*ibid.*, 1966), pp. 1081–1086.

[9] One excellent example is a "prophecy", a long verse passage (BU CHOS.172) which is a paean to Tibet as Buddhism's sacred land "north of Vajrāsana". While its subject is the praise of 'Brom Ston (1005–1064), its opening verse shows that Tibet was still known to its author as the Spu Rgyal kingdom. This is another example of how the *Bu chos* is a transitional literature of the early Phyi Dar which preserved a consciousness of the Imperium while laying the groundwork for a Sangha-centered Buddhist culture. In this case, Tibet was shifting from being valued as a powerful geopolitical entity (which it may no longer have been seen as) to being a land considered even more valuable because it was sacred due to the presence of Avalokiteśvara and his representatives, the Sangha. The opening verses are: *Pu [sic] Rgyal kyi zhing khams grags pa can / sgos su kha ba can ljongs khyad 'phags na / nyid sgos dbu ru byang phyogs de nang nas / klung shod nag po thog rgyud 'Brom gyi yul / chos dang dpal 'byor rgyas par 'gyur ro zhes / sngon gyi rgyal ba rnams kyis byin rlabs pa'i / sa gnas phun sum tshogs pa 'di lta ste / Ra zhes bya ba 'dod chags rdul dang bral*… (*ibid.* 172).

A few lines down, we learn that Ra [Sgreng] is also the *pho brang* of Spyan-ras-gzigs, *ri bo Po-ta-la dang mtshungs*. The next pages (pp. 173–175), contain a lavish praise of Avalokiteśvara which combines generalities with allusions or clear references to Tibet. It includes many political elements, and in them we learn that Tibet's real prestige and power rest not on secular political accomplishments, but on the transcendent nature

of Tibet itself because of Avalokiteśvara's presence. This is a sentiment appropriate for post-Imperial Tibet.

Some passages illustrative of Avalokiteśvara's nature and relationship with Tibet in this long set of verses include: *'dul ba khrims ldan dge 'dun rin chen te / Mdo Sde sems ldan dam chos rin chen yin / mngon pa shes rab Sangs Rgyas ngo bo ste / Dkon Mchog Gsum ldan 'gro la bde skyid 'byin /…gnas de Spyan Ras Gzigs kyi pho brang yin / Mgon-po Spyan Ras Gzigs khyed der byon tshe / gser gyi pad sdong yal 'dab stong ldan pa / dbus na Yum Chen Pha-rol Phyin-ma bzhugs / phyogs bcu'i rgyal bas rab tu bskor byas te / zag med chos kyi dga' ston 'gyed par byed / 'Gro-ba'i Dpal Mgon Spyan Ras Gzigs Dbang 'di /…gnas der pad sdong nyi khri chig stong 'khrungs / re re la'ang yal 'dab nyi khri dang / chig stong dbyibs dang kha dog rab tu gsal / de la phyogs bcu'i rgyal ba dpag med bzhugs /…gnas de byin gyis rlob cing lhun por gnas / dmag dpon dpa' bo khyim bdag 'byor ba can / btsun mo rin chen glang po theg pa can / nor bu rin chen rta mchog rdzu 'phrul can / 'khor lo rtsibs stong dpag med mkha' 'gro'i gnas / rgyal ba khyod kyi rgyal srid bskyang phyir 'khod…*

In this story of 'Brom Ston's prior life as Dkon Mchog 'Bangs, Avalokiteśvara is pictured as providing a country with the qualities necessary for a Cakravartin ruler via a set of symbolisms here, including the occurence of gold and lotus-shaped lands. (We also see here an explanation for the sacramental use of Prajñāpāramitā literature which has long been especially prominent in Western Tibet. Its prophylactic value at the center of a kingdom is clear here.)

The mechanism by which this was accomplished for Tibet is a motif found in several places in the *Bu chos*. In this narrative, the fact that 'Brom Ston was born in Tibet does not explain the presence of Avalokiteśvara there, of course. It is secondary to explaining his role at installing an image of Avalokiteśvara at Rwa Sgreng, which accomplished the goal of placing Tibet under his protection. Since both Atiśa and 'Brom Ston were also actually incarnations of Avalokiteśvara (BU CHOS.26)—indeed, all Bka'-gdams-pa *bla ma*s were considered incarnations (*sprul pa*) of Avalokiteśvara—we have the basis for the creation of the office of the Dalai Lama, as well as all other incarnations. BU CHOS.426, with its discussion of the nature and value of the *sku dngos*, may be the earliest formulation of this position. The following statement is put in the mouth of Rngog Blo-ldan Shes Rab: *Rngog na re / bla ma dam pa'i sku 'dra ba tsam zhig bzhengs pa las / bla ma dngos kyi yon tan brjod pa gal che bar dga' yis zhus pas / bshes gnyen pa'i zhal nas / de dag thams cad 'das nas min pa la sku dngos kyi yon tan bya ba ci la zer gsungs pas / Rngog na re / 'das pa'i rjes rnam pa nas rnam pa thams cad du bcad dgos pa'ang mi dga' yis / da lta nga la sku dngos su byung bas chog / bshes gnyen pa'i zhal nas / sku dngos bya ba chos sku la zer ba yin nga la sku dngos dang ma zer gsungs pas / Rngog na re / sku dngos bya ba chos sku la zer na'ang zer / mi zer na'ang mi zer / nged 'dra ba'i gdul bya la mthong ngos shes pa'i sprul sku rang dga' bar dga' yis / zhes…*

[10] As previously mentioned, *contra* the position asserted by Alexander MacDonald in his article "Religion in Tibet at the time of Srong-btsan Sgam-po: myth as history", the question of Srong Btsan Sgam-po's religiosity cannot be reduced to whether or not he was a Buddhist based on the exaggerated claims of later tradition. It actually cannot be approached well at all, considering that we know so little about life at his court. One thing we do know, based on clear precedent, is the degree to which Buddhists accommodated themselves to conditions at courts as augmenters of royal power.

We need to say that we are honestly unable to identify even the principal beliefs of any other tradition Srong Btsan Sgam-po was supposed by some to have participated in, except for the elements of court religion based on Indo-European practices described in Chapter One. Objective archaeological examination of the oldest layers of the edifice that tradition tells us he built, the Jo Khang, actually reveals evidence of Buddhism very close to, if not during, his reign.

Gaozong, whose reign as Tang Emperor began in 649, bestowed upon Srong Btsan Sgam-po the posthumous title *Baowang*, an epithet of Amitābha. (C.I. Beckwith, *The*

Tibetan Empire in Central Asia, p. 25f.) One of two scenarios for this action is likely: Buddhists at the Tang court recommended this titulature based on known interests at the Tibetan court, or some representatives from the Tibetan court provided information that this would be a welcome acknowledgement. In either case, the bestowal of this title was not an arbitrary act. (This was reinforced by the position of Tibet, to the west of China, which made it easy to consider it Amitābha's paradise, which also fit considerations of the place of the Chinese Emperor in a *maṇḍala*.) Further, given the problematic relationship between Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara, identification either with both, or especially with Avalokiteśvara as the active agent of Amitābha, seems commonsensical and is attested in KVS literature in the Bodhisattva's character. This would have been a simple point for monks who were acquainted with the opening of the KVS and other documents to present at court. They would have been aware of the imperial nature of Avalokiteśvara.

We thus have further evidence to see Srong Btsan Sgam-po as a ruler who was connected with a cult belonging to Mahayana Buddhism. Combined with data from the Jo Khang, we now have two, radically distinct sorts of evidence that the court of the time of Srong Btsan Sgam-po either had Buddhist practitioners or accepted Buddhist values.

The assertion by Greg Schopen that the cult of Avalokiteśvara did not begin until the fifth century ("The inscription of the Kuśan image of Amitābha and the character of early Mahāyāna in India". *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist studies*.10.99–138) supports this scenario. (The second *Avalokitasūtra* also dates to around the fifth century.) Religious trends, as we know, are like any others at courts. Striking in its novelty, the cult of Avalokiteśvara would certainly have been attractive to a ruler who may have never heard such claims about a spiritual being before.

It is also easy to explain the lack of the development of a discrete cult of Avalokiteśvara which survived Srong Btsan Sgam-po's reign. Historical sources tell of a period after his death where power shifted to Blon-po Mgar. When the next btsan-po grew up and finally took power, he spent nearly all his time at the head of his troops. Therefore, conditions seem not to have been propitious for the consolidation of any set of religious beliefs surrounding the btsan-po at court. With regard to the survival—or revival—of Avalokiteśvara in Tibet, we note again the frequent reference in PT016 to the efforts of Ral-pa-can being motivated by *thugs rje chen po*.

[11] Note this even more explicit passage from *Tibetan legal materials*, p. 41: "…*mchod yon nyi zla zung gcig gis bka' khrims stobs kyi 'khor los bsgyur / mnga' 'bangs dus bde'i dpal la spyod / skyid pa'i nyi ma dgung nas shar" /…zhes brjod nas / ji skad du / phyag stong <u>'khor los bsgyur ba'i rgyal po stong</u> / spyan stong skal pa bzang po'i Sangs Rgyas stong / gang la gang 'dul de la de ston pa'i / Btsun-pa Spyan-ras-gzigs la phyag 'tshal lo / zhes gsung[s] pa ltar / Bod kha ba can 'di 'Phags-pa 'Jig-rten Dbang-phyug gi zhing kham dam par gyur pas*…

This passage, which then goes on to praise the former Dharmarājas of Tibet for preparing the way for this blessed state, is prototypical of the ideology surrounding Avalokiteśvara from the KVS on. Here the motifs of (Sahasrabhuja Lokanātha) Avalokiteśvara as creator of Cakravartins, the latter as rulers of Tibet, and the oath that bound him to Tibet combine to provide the basis for government under a spiritual being with unparalleled power and ability to protect and shepherd his people and their leaders. From the point of view of his solar nature, note that as "the sun of happiness appearing from heaven" for his people is not presented as a metaphor or simile, but a simple statement.

[12] One might think that such a mechanism would remove the faithful from a close connection with Avalokiteśvara. However, this is not an either/or situation. A little further on, we learn that one who merely offers flowers to Avalokiteśvara will be born into a perfect body. [*Mdo sde Za ma tog*.79] Thus, a variety of rewards are available, and, as with much Mahayana literature, Cakravartin status seems ever-present. However,

in this case—because it is a consequence of something as mechanical as copying the text—it is not considered a special attainment.

[13] Ishihama notes (ISHIHAMA.49–53) the great efforts the Fifth Dalai Lama made, while travelling to China and around Tibet, to quickly disseminate belief among various nationalities—Tibetans, Chinese, Manchus, Mongols—that he was Avalokiteśvara. Aside from consolidating power by providing a clear definition of his nature, he was also certainly making these resources available, "advertising", as it were, his occult nature and its resources.

In these efforts, Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang Rgya-mtsho, the Fifth Dalai Lama, was not so much creating, as following, precedent, something he was certainly aware of. Prior Tibetan religious justification of Mongolian rule is analyzed in Herbert Francke, *From tribal chieftain to universal emperor and god*, p. 52ff, and David Farquhar. "Emperor as Bodhisattva in the governance of the Ch'ing Empire". *Harvard journal of Asiatic studies*. 38.1978.5–34. Cf. especially the latter, p. 17f. Here we see that, as seems to have been the case in Imperial Tibet, at least with Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's efforts at Bsam-yas (see below), rulers could simultaneously be members of Bodhisattva lineages as well as Cakravartins. This was prior to the creation of connections between the Dalai Lamas and Manchu rulers.

It would be easy to demonstrate that Cakravartin status is so frequently mentioned in Buddhist literature that, in fact, it may be implicitly assumed, even when not explicitly claimed. Mongol rulers frequently claimed openly to possess it, Manchu rulers not, although the latter (as Bodhisattvas) certainly could have claimed it at any time. (On this see David Farquhar. "The origins of the Manchus' Mongolian policy". *The Chinese world order* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 198–205, especially p. 201.)

The salient point here is that Sanghas at courts were free to make such claims of rulers, whether or not the latter chose to publicize this status. The Manchu case is somewhat complicated by Confucian values, but one thing that seems certain is that, as an inheritance of Mongolian practice, they had the presence of a Dge-lugs-pa Sangha. Even before the proclamation of the Fifth Dalai Lama as Avalokiteśvara, Cakravartin status would have been offered to Manchu rulers. On this point, see the dissertation of Samuel Grupper, *The Manchu imperial cult of the early Ch'ing Dynasty: texts and studies on the Tantric sanctuary of Mahākāla at Mukden*, Indiana University, 1980, for Mongolian Buddhist values transmitted at an early period to Manchu courts, and even for Sa Skya polity before that. Both utilized the title of Cakravartin almost as a matter of course (see especially pp. 55 and 121f).

[14] The Rnying-ma tradition eventually—we are not sure of the date of its inception—developed a complex of visionary, prophetic literature surrounding the idea that the descendents of the btsan-pos had retreated to lands outside the center of Tibet. These were accessible only to the spiritually prepared. On this point, I refer the reader especially to the study of Geoff Childs, "Refuge and revitalization: hidden Himalayan sanctuaries (*sbas yul*) and the preservation of Tibet's Imperial lineage". *Acta orientalia* (Copenhagen). 60.1999.126–158. This article is a good source for the historical and literary setting behind the development of *sbas yul* literature. The development of *gter ma* literature is complementary to this, in that its inception is based—at least in part—on creating a present relevance for the btsan-pos, in particular Srong Btsan Sgam-po. On this see Ronald Davidson, "Imperial agency in the *gsar ma* treasure texts during the Tibetan renaissance: the *rgyal po bla gter* and related literature". *Tibetan Buddhist literature and praxis* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p. 125ff. (The argument in this article would have been strengthened had he understood the inherently political nature of *bla* as demonstrated in the present work.) In later times as well, interest in *sbas yul* was an expression of insecurity caused by foreign threats to Tibet. On this see Franz-Karl Erhard, "Political and ritual aspects of the search for Himalayan sacred lands". SCEAR.9.1996.37–53.

This tradition is based on the asserted memory of the origin of the Rnying-ma-pa in its service to the btsan-pos, especially Padmasambhava at the court of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan. In fact, however, the entire *genre* certainly dates at least to the period of the Mongol invasions and Sa-skya hegemony, and may also preserve the memory of Turkic invasions to the west of Tibet. In other words, its politics, like that of the Bka'-gdams-pas, was stimulated at least in part by the *absence* of the Imperium. The development of a hidden-lands concept was a response to the sense of helplessness that Tibetans, who were disunited, under Mongol rule, and still conscious of the absence of the protection of the btsan-pos, had felt for some long time. This is why the principal characteristic of *sbas yul* is that they provide unassailable security from invaders who have no real trouble conquering Tibet itself. [Childs.143f]

Not surprisingly, the connection with Mang Yul/Lha Yul Gung Thang has been preserved. However, as time has gone by, it has also fallen victim to foreign conquest. Thus, there is no land within Tibet ruled by the lineage of the btsan-pos, and thus none imbued with their presence. [*ibid.* 142] In order to preserve their own version of service to their rulers, it was necessary for the Rnying-ma-pa to move the Imperium to another level of reality, and to redefine the family of the btsan-pos. This was done by creating a politics of occultation. It was not directly centered on Avalokiteśvara, as developed with the Dalai Lamas, but on the creation of a secure court and land which could only be recognized, taken and controlled by a *sngags pa* who was a direct descendent of the lineage of btsan-pos. [*ibid.* 144]

In both traditions, it was felt necessary that leadership of the Sangha remain in the hands of the nobility, but this concept also had to be adapted. For the Bka'-gdams-pas and early Dge-lugs-pas, the *bla ma*s were the real nobility in two ways, being both incarnations and representatives of Avalokiteśvara. That most, especially in the early Phyi Dar, still came from noble families shows a strong continuity with documents of the late Imperial Sanghas which addressed their special role as leaders of Buddhism in Tibet. For the Rnying-ma-pa, the leadership of the nobility was expressed in continued allegiance to the presence of the imperial lineage, i.e., the *sngags pa* who could find *sbas yul* had to be from the lineage of the btsan-pos. Then, under the leadership of such a person, the *sbas yul* should be populated by those *ya rabs* or 'nobility' possessed of pure thoughts. [*ibid.* 145] In other words, the old court would be reconstituted on this occult level.

In one way, the latter tradition would seem to continue the culture of Buddhism in the Imperium more directly than the Dge-lugs-pa. However, both traditions have had to replace a functional government, not only a btsan-po but a court and entire administration. This made it too difficult to recapitulate Imperial realities. The Bka'-gdams/Dge-lugs tradition set the lineage of btsan-pos aside, while for the early Rnying-ma it was necessary, not only from the point of nostalgia (*ibid.* 148f) but because they remained essentially a *sngags pa* tradition. They needed to claim propriety over the spiritual essence of the btsan-po lineage as a valuable resource while maintaining their status as independent practitioners.

[15] Previous studies of *gtsug lag* include the philological observations of Michael Hahn in "A propos the term *gtsug lag*" (*Tibetan studies*. Wien, 1997, vol. 1, pp. 347–354) and the overview by R.A. Stein, "Tibetica antiqua III. A propos du mot gcug-lag et de la religion indigène" (BEFEO.74.1985.83–133.). The latter article begins with a critique of the earliest study of *gtsug lag*, that of Ariane MacDonald in "Une lecture…", in which many of the currently accepted shades of its meaning were first asserted. For later interpretations, see n. 21, below.

[16] See LI & COBLIN: pp. 47–8, The Treaty Inscription of 821–822, line 8 (*yul mtho sa gtsa[ng] [g]nam gyï lha las / myi'i rgyal po gshegs te / gtsug lag chen pos nï / [yund] kyi srid btsugs*) and line 20 (too eroded to allow a clear context for the phrase); p. 229: the 'Phyong Rgyas inscription, line 2 (*chos gtsug lag ni lugs kyis bzang / dbu rmog brtsan po ni byin du che'o*) and line 7 (*yab myes kyi lugs bzhin / lha'i gtsug lag nï ma nyams*);

p. 254, ll. 4ff (*dbu rmog ni yun tu brtsan pa'ï / g.yung drung gi gtsug lag chen po bzhin du / btsan po lha sras khrï / lde srong brtsan / myï'i rje mdzad pa*…)

[17] It bears repeating: Khri Srong Lde Brtsan was sincerely, though by his own words as preserved in Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag 'Phreng-ba, not exclusively, a Buddhist emperor. The earliest inscriptions were created during his reign. At least some of these were composed by monks. Therefore, we need to do a little more work than simply to see a term in them which is not clearly Buddhist, or has no current relationship with Buddhism, and then to draw conclusions about its origin and religious meaning.

A. MacDonald erred in assuming that such a concept was opposed to belief in Buddhism or its principles. (Cf. "Une lecture…", p. 370. She cites no source to support this assertion. She buttresses her assumption with a mistaken interpretation of *mi chos*, which she also makes a part of Tibet's ancient religion, a tradition Stein followed in his *La civilisation tibétaine*). Both statements, and other conclusions she came to, were based on the assumption that Buddhism at court was opposed to some other religion or set of religious beliefs. That we have found no clear evidence of such in truly ancient documents should make us cautious about accepting this viewpoint.

In fact, if *gtsug lag* did, indeed, refer to some inspired statecraft which involved previous generations of rulers, then it also certainly involved elements of Buddhist belief, as we demonstrate here. However, even the assumption of many that *gtsug lag* was present at courts at an indeterminate past time, perhaps as far back as the reign of Srong Btsan Sgam-po, is by definition an argument *ex silencio*. (Khri Srong Lde Brtsan does assert, in the full-length version of the Bsam-yas inscription at DPA'-BO.1985.1.370f, that all previous btsan-pos were Buddhists, or at least he attributed their success to Buddhism: *Dkond Cog Gsum ni byin du cher che ste / yab mes snga ma kun gyi ring la yang gdung rabs re re zhing lugs su mdzad de / gtsug lag khang gsar rnying dngos yod pa yin*. The reference to *gtsug lag khang* new and old would include the Jo Khang.)

Aside from the points made in the main body of this chapter, there are further arguments that *gtsug lag* at least included elements of Buddhist belief. It is hardly likely Khri Srong Lde Brtsan would have continued to praise a basis for polity he had turned away from in his support of Buddhism. We have good circumstantial evidence of this in the fact that *gtsug lag* was very early taken up into Buddhist culture in Tibet. One prominent example is Old Tibetan *gtsug lag khang*, discussed here. The most direct evidence we have that MacDonald was in error is found in the BKA' YANG DAG. To return to the quotation from it in Chapter Two: It addresses the point under discussion, that statements a btsan-po puts forward, because they are superior to those of (ordinary) human beings, demonstrate his transcendent leadership: *rtags yod pa gang zhe na / yang ni mi las bla mar gyur pas gtsug lag tu gyur ston to*, "If one asks, 'What are your proofs?', then, because they are superior to (those arguments put forward by) human beings, they are shown to have been *gtsug lag*," i.e., they showed a special inspiration befitting a btsan-po.

On the other hand, even if *gtsug lag* was a truly ancient concept, originally "pre-Buddhist", from early on it should have included elements of statecraft taken from Nepal, Khotan, China, the Uyghurs, etc., that the btsan-pos found useful at their courts. Buddhist beliefs and the fact that Sanghas were a resource at courts would have been among these. In other words, one way or another Buddhism would have become part of *gtsug lag* because, being useful for at least several btsan-pos, it would have been believed that the btsan-po was following the will of his ancestors, his *yab myes*, by supporting Buddhism. An outstanding example is the relationship between Khri Srong Lde Brtsan and his father, Mes Ag Tshom, as expressed in the inscriptions of the former.

[18] Cf. John Powers, *The Yogācāra school of Buddhism: a bibliography* (Metuchen, NJ & London: American Theological Library Association & Scarecrow Press, 1991), p. 18. It is referred to there as a commentary on a Yogācāra text. This leads us to speculate about the political considerations of Sanghas of various Mahayana philosophical positions at courts. Certainly, we can see variety in the Pali and Sanskrit Theravada materials from India and Central Asia.

[19] *'jig rten gyi lha dag gi gtsug lag la bsngags par mi smra ba yang de dag gis bdag la gnod pa byas pa'i phyir zhe sdang ba ma yin te / rigs pas brtags na de ltar khyad zhugs kyi sems can la srog spang du mi rung ba dang 'dra bar Dam-pa'i Chos kyang bzung zhing pa ca nga bar bya'o / 'jig rten gyi lha dang mi la yon tan dang mthu yod pa kun kyang yun ring po'i dus na Dkon Mchog Gsum la bsnyen bkur byas pa'i dge ba'i rtsa ba las ma byung ba med de / gtsug lag go cog gi snying po ni Sangs Rgyas kyi chos so zhes bya ba…*

[20] At least by the time of the *Sba bzhed* (SBA BZHED.1982.2) we find that the power of the Chinese Emperor rested on his three hundred and sixty *gab tshe*, which was his *Rgya Nag gtsug lag*. Later in this document (p. 19), Śāntarakṣita is also asserted to possess *gtsug lag*. Ral-pa-can, in IO751.36a4, refers to *gtsug lag khang thams cad tshul bzhin…*, which is either a miswriting with an inserted *khang*, or an assertion of an independent spiritual status among monasteries.

In other words, *gtsug lag* is neither a unitary, nor a culturally limited, concept. This made it easier for those in the Phyi Dar to use it as a general term for technical knowledge, special talents, and unusual abilities. Nevertheless, the idea that other leaders would possess *gtsug lag* is not inconsistent with court beliefs of the time. The opposite is true; it was assumed that, since rulers felt that *their* power was based on spiritual beings and other such resources, they assumed that all empires had similar power bases. Again, the Mongol courts evidence this attitude clearly.

[21] BKA' YANG DAG, p. 101, column 1, Khri Srong refers more specifically to his source of inspiration: *gtsug lag gi mdo bskrun pa de yang gang zhe na / chos so cog gi thog ma'i mtha' dang mtha' ma'i mtha'i lo rgyus dang / sems can dang snod kyi 'jig rten gyi khams kyi rim pa dang rnam grangs dang / 'khor ba na gnas pa'i rgyu ci las byung thar bar bya ba'i lam gang yin / 'khor ba na gnas pa'i nyes pa ci yod / thar bar gyur ba'i yon tan cis 'phags lung las 'byung ba'i tshig 'gal ba 'dra ba zhig yod gang yang mi spang bar gnyis ka 'thun par sgrub pa dang / 'di rnams bskrun pa'o.*

In some way, he considered elements of Sutras, perhaps only particular teachings that appealed to him, to belong to his *gtsug lag*. These included analyzing the elements which pertained to the bases of existence in *saṃsāra*, the evils that come from it, and the way out of it. Similar basic Buddhist doctrines are also presented in the full-length version of the Bsam-yas edict at DPA'-BO.1985, such as this passage near its opening: *Dkond Cog Gsum nam du yang mi btang ma zhig bar dgyi ba'i gtsigs sgrom bu nang na mchis pa'i dpe / De Bzhin Gshegs-pa'i bka' las byung ba don thog tu sbyar na yang dag pa nyid khong du ma chud pas khams gsum yang sdug bsngal gyi gnas su gyur / thams cad kyang gna' nas ma skyes pa med / skyes nas ni don dang don med par spyod / de nas kyang shi bar 'gyur / shi nas kyang gnas bzang ngan du phyir skye / de la legs su ston pa ni Sangs Rgyas /…*

[22] *gtsug lag* also came to be considered "divination" in PT1047, and we saw in n. 20 that the *Sba bzhed*, as a transitional document, applied the term more widely than may have occurred during the Imperial period. Apparently, it was a concept known outside the court at a fairly early date (it is in the inscriptions, of course) and its basis there as an method to decide policy would certainly have allowed later interpretations. The variety of its applications in Phyi Dar culture, which revolve around astrology and occult talents, seems therefore quite appropriate.

[23] In addition to the study of Rolf Stein cited above, see also Michael Hahn, "A propos the term *gtsug lag*", *op. cit.* n. 15.

[24] Cf. Chapter Two, n. 47 especially; however, observations are also made in Chapter One, n. 43; Chapter Two, nn. 41, 48, and 49; and, Chapter Three, n. 24.

[25] In addition to the assertions by Samten Karmay in "The Tibetan cult of mountain deities and its political significance", critiqued here at Chapter One, n. 47 and Chapter Two, nn. 37, 42, and 47. Not all modern Tibetans who have attempted to reconstruct religion during the Imperium, or an ancient Bon tradition, assert a "mountain cult". See on this, for example, Namkhai Norbu, *Drung, deu and Bön…* (Dharamsala: LTWA, 1995).

The following studies cite much previous literature on the role of mountains in ancient Tibet. Waida Manabu's "Symbolism of 'descent' in Tibetan sacred kingship and some East Asian parallels" pursues an analysis of the motif of descent of leadership from a heaven (i.e., *gnam*). The author compares the roles of mountains in Tibetan and Japanese cultures in particular, and shows that in both examples, mountains have been the intermediate point for the descent of a ruler to earth, but not much more analysis is made, especially with regard to Tibetan political mythology. J. Russell Kirkland's "The spirit of the mountain: myth and state in pre-Buddhist Tibet" sees the same cultural parallels, and deals with the same question, but centers on Tibet. Although he does not take a critical, or even chronological, approach to motifs connecting ancestral btsan-pos with mountains, and his conclusions are therefore not plausible, he does point out numerous inconsistencies in traditions which, taken together, preclude us from being able to reconstruct any Imperial tradition to that effect.

[26] Unlike Imperial-period Old Tibetan documents, the *Chronicle* does contain statements that may point to a "mountain cult". In contrast to the abbreviated statements about the descent of the btsan-pos from *lha* which are found in the inscriptions and other sources, and which make no mention of mountains in the powers of the btsan-pos, the *Chronicle* seems to present a slightly different picture. In the analysis that follows, it should be kept in mind that the *Chronicle* is a post-Imperial document, and that it contains Buddhist elements. It should not be assumed that everything (or anything) in it reflects court, or truly ancient, beliefs.

First, to cite some relevant passages, we have: PT1286.41: *Yar Lha Sham-po ni gtsug gï lha'o*, as well as the passages cited in the two following notes. We may add to this the less straightforward passage at PT1286.28–29: *mtha' ma 'O Lde Spu Rgyal gyï dbu rmog ma thub ste / mnar ni lha nar gyis mnard*. The first is a statement of the belief that Mount Yar Lha Sham-po is the mountain of a wise ancestral spiritual being. The second passage refers to the *lha* suffering because the military power of 'O Lde Spu Rgyal could not protect it. The first may be a metaphorical statement, and the latter certainly refers to the ancestor 'O Lde Spu Rgyal, not the mountain, which would make it consistent with ancient belief.

At PT1287.469 and .471 we have the swearings, in another court panegyric, *Thang Lha nï Ya Bzhur mkhyen* and *Yar Lha nï Sham-po mkhyen*. These might be the earliest examples we have of the circumlocution wherein a mountain (or the ancestral *lha* who inhabits the area just above it) is invoked as a witness for an oath or the truth-value of a statement. On the other hand, these seem to be simply formalized dramatic expressions. (They remind one of the famous, later asseverative, *bla ma mkhyen*.) One should keep in mind that there are numerous oath-taking episodes in the *Chronicle*, and swearing "by a mountain" is never explicitly mentioned, nor can it be deduced from the contexts. (See R. Stein, "Saint et divin…", p. 265n., who also believes that the phrases above relate somehow to oaths, but, again, with no reference to mountains.) It is difficult to reconstruct religious values from any of the above statements. As the closest thing we have to a court epic (composed, as many were, long after the fact), it is often difficult to decide how to interpret its many poetic passages.

When, however, F.W. Thomas asserts at AFL.104, "Two of the divinities, Thaṅ-lha-Ya-bžur…and Yar-lha-Śam-pho…, a Yar-luṅ god, are actually known as local deities in pre-Buddhist Tibet", he is making an unsubstantiated claim, because we again have the problem of calculating when—or *if*—there was a pre-Buddhist Tibet, at least as a political entity. He also is reading something into these passages based on later traditions, such as the current fame and stories about 'O Lde Spu Rgyal *as a mountain*, which cannot be traced to Imperial belief.

When all is said and done, the emphasis on the role of mountains in the *Chronicle* that may refer to governance is not found in other ancient documents. In contrast to the statements about the descent of the btsan-pos from *lha* in *gnam* which are found in the inscriptions (both their stone and full-length versions) and other sources, and

which make no mention of a relationship with mountains or even give them a place in the power of the btsan-pos, the *Chronicle* presents a slightly different picture of the environment within which the btsan-pos functioned. This is due to the fact that it is not a court document, but one written more from the point of view of the clans and their service to the btsan-pos. It is clearly an old document, and contains some ancient traditions which are substantiated by passages in the inscriptions. However, since it seems to be more a product of clan beliefs, and is poetic and dramatic in nature, the *lha ri* may have been brought forward there in literary expressions which were meant to emphasize their importance as supports. Indeed, the *Chronicle* does not go out of its way to elevate the importance of the btsan-pos or beliefs associated with them.

In short, it seems prudent to consider the *Chronicle* as a source of information about the btsan-pos which is of a different nature and purpose than the inscriptions and other truly ancient documents for several reasons, most especially its viewpoint.

[27] Ariane MacDonald doesn't have much to say about the place of mountains in religion in "Une lecture…". However, on p. 351 she interprets a phrase from the *Chronicle*, *rje ni gnam ri phywa lugs*. In other contexts, the world of the Phywa provides a model for human institutions, and that may be what is intended here. However, we have very little data about the Phywa, and interpretations presented here about the nature of rule in Tibet and terms involved in her discussion in this passage, including the significance of the name Gnam Ri Slon Mtshan, differs from hers (the interpretation here is based on what the *Chronicle* itself says). The most pertinent observation about the passages she cites is that they do not point toward a "mountain cult", and until we can better distinguish the role of allusion and metaphor, and obscure references to the Phywa, we should avoid trying to incorporate them into something larger.

One other minor point: Khri Srong Lde Brtsan was buried on Has-po Ri. Now considered by some to be one of the four 'sacred mountains' of Central Tibet, presumably because of its proximity to Bsam-yas, it otherwise has no role to play in the religion of his court. While it is mentioned several times in the *Sba bzhed*, it occurs only once in a motif, and that is of purely Buddhist inspiration. Especially in this case, had there been something of a cult developed around the mountain and the presence of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan there, had he *any* special relationship with it, the Sangha of the time—and later—would have annexed it or otherwise made it known to us.

[28] We also find in the CHRONICLE (PT1287.351ff) another ancient, poetic praise of the btsan-pos, and this would be an appropriate place to mention the role of a mountain, especially in light of what has been said in n. 26. And, without the space constraint of a stone slab, more detail about the basis of their power could be expected. Instead, it reads much like the openings of several inscriptions, and we again learn of descent by the btsan-pos, here through seven blue heavens (which is the only novel detail; in another post-Imperial source, nine heavens are mentioned), to rule the world of human beings: *dgung sngo ni bdun rim gyï // lha yul ni gung dang nas // lha sras nï myi 'i mgon / myï yul nï thams chad dang / myi mtshungs nï myi 'dra' ste // yul mtho nï sa gtsang bas // bod yul nï gshang du gshegs // myï yul nï kun gyi rgyal // chos bzang nï gtsug che bas // rgyal pran nï kun kyang 'dum*. The operative power which caused the clan/local leaders (*rgyal pran*) to reconcile themselves to the btsan-po was his inspired military leadership, based on the *gtsug* (*lag*?) of his ancestors. No mention is made here of mountains, although it may have been important for these local leaders to consult, ritually, with their local *lha ri* before entering this contractual agreement (*'dum*) with the btsan-po. This would agree with the analysis of similar passages in n. 26. And, of course, it should be kept in mind that the *chos bzang* here is, in fact, Buddhism. As we saw above, Khri Srong Lde Brtsan considered the Buddha's teachings to be the essence of his *gtsug lag*, and it probably always was so.

[29] PT1287.270–272, the first of a pair of quatrains: *de nas dba'as dbyi tshab kyis mchïd blangs pa / btsan du ni bdag 'tshal na / chung na ni rje khur chig / pyug du ni bdag 'tshal na / lha rï ni g.yang skyong shig*. I.e., "If I have a wish for power, Oh Lord,

carry me when I am feeble! If I have a wish for wealth, Oh Lha Ri, protect my *g.yang*!" (Compare the translation at DTH.145.)

This passage seems to tell us that, indeed, the btsan-po really had no control over the *g.yang* of his comitatus, and that this was, again, a function of a local clan cult centered on *lha ri*.

Other metaphorical invocations relating to mountains occurs in the onomastics of the time. At OTMET#247 (vol. 2, p. 81) we encounter two names/titles which are symbolic: The author of the letter, Lha Ri Skyes, and an official who may be coming with medicine, Rgyal Zigs Lha Rtsa Skyes ("Born at the base of a Lha Ri"?). As stated earlier, many names and titles seem to have had an apotropaic or prophylactic origin.

[30] PT239.1402–1802:…*Dkon Mchog Gsum la brten de / yang dag pa'i chu gang ma nor pa'ï sod nams gyï tshogs 'dï dag la / brten cïn bdeg nas / bde skyid phun sum tshogs pa'ï lha yul dam par 'gro ba'ï lam nï / 'dzam bu gling 'di nas / byang phyogs na rï rab lhun po zhes bya ba / rï 'i rgyal po rïn po che sna bzhi las grub pa zhïg yod de / de ' ï steng na chos bzang lha 'i 'dun sa na / lha ' ï dpang po Brgya' byin dang / blon po gsum cu rtsa gnyïs dang / lha dang myï dang srïd pa'ï ltang phye zhing lam ston pa yod de /…dga' ldan lha 'ï gnas na / Sangs Rgyas Shag-kyï[kya]-thub-pa / chos gyï rgyal tsab / 'Pags-pa Byams-pa zhes bya ba / 'khor byang cub sems dpa' Ba-su-myï-dra dang / Seng-'ge bar snang la stsogs pa / bskal bzang po 'ï byang cub sems dpa' / dgu brgya dgu bcu rtsa drug la stsogs pa dang / lha'i bu grangs myed pa dang / rïn po che 'ï gzhal myed khang gyï nang na / lha rdzas kyï lhab lhub dang / rol mo sna tshogs gyï longs spyod dang ldan ba / bsam gyïs myï khyab pa las stsogs pa / skyid pa'ï rgyu rkyen phun sum tshogs pa / lha yul dam pa der / bde dgu la bag yod par spyod cig /*

[31] PT016.34r4–34v4: *Bod chen po 'phrul kyï lha btsan po sku la byïnd chags / thugs la 'phrul mnga' ba'ï zha snga nas / 'greng mgo nag gï rjer myï rjer lha las gshegs te / rgyal khams gzhan gyï rgyal po gang bas kyang 'phags shïng thugs la 'phrul mnga' dgongs pa nam ka'ï dbyïngs dang 'dra bar yangs shïng rgya che / ri rab lhun po bzhïn du bkra' drang gsung rtag / gnyï zla'ï 'od dang 'dra bar / byams pa dang thugs rjes khyab par mdzad de…Bod rje blon byang cub gyï spyod pa dang / sngon gyi bsod nams dang / smon lam gyï shugs kyïs 'dzam bu gling 'dï'i rgyal pho chen po bzhï'i 'bangs 'greng dud la thugs rje chen po'ï byin kyis khyab ste/ mtha' dag bde skyid par dgongste…* These passages preface a series of rites for the founding of De-ga G.yu-tshal Monastery, which, in turn, transition easily to the quote in n. 32.

[32] As we have in descriptions of the courts of a Cakravartin, the court of Avalokiteśvara is made of seven precious substances, and it is from here that his emanations of the universe procede. This is, in fact, a political statement. It is not difficult to see from passages in PT239 and PT016 that Avalokiteśvara seems to be in the background of several of the figures of speech.

[33] IO751.36r1–37r2:…*Bod kyï lha btsan po / 'phrul gyï zha snga nas bzhugs te / yong yang / chu bo chen po'i glad / gangs rï mthon po'i rtsa / yul mtho sa gtshang ba'ï gnas na bzhugs pas / 'phrul gyï lha btshan po ni // gdung rabs 'grangs par yang / lha'i lugs ma mnyam ste / rgyal po gzhan bas / che zhing brtsan bar mngon / de ltar yab myes lha dang stang bas / yong yang / chab srid che / dbu rmog brtsan ba'ï steng du / 'phrul gyï lha btshan po Khri Gtsug Lde Brtsan gyi zha snga nas / sku la dbyig 'khrungs / thugs la 'phrul mnga' ste /…Dkon Mchog Gsum dang / 'jig rten gyï lha klu thams cad kyis kyang mkhyend cïng gzigs pas na / nam du yang myï 'gyur zhing brtan bar smond to /*

[34] The title *mnga' bdag* was first applied to Sad-na Legs, r. 799?–815, in the Skar Chung inscription, which is dated to his reign; cf. LI & COBLIN.319.

Cf. Alain Danielou, *Hindu polytheism* (New York: Bollingen Foundation), p. 302. Īśvara as Śiva was also connected with a "mountain cult" at Angkor, on which see Hermann Kulke, *Kings and cults*…, p. 340f, and here we also find that Bodhisattva most often related with this same cult, Lokeśvara. In other words, we also have Avalokiteśvara, and again in an overtly political setting, the nexus of that Bodhisattva identified with a ruler, living or dead, and his Cakravartin status. (See here Georges Cœdes, "Le culte

de la royauté divine au Cambodge", p. 60. Material cited here dates to the early eleventh century.) The XIYUJI (vol. 2, p. 233) paints a vivid picture of beliefs surrounding Potalaka as Avalokiteśvara's abode in South India. There he resides among the gods, coming and going, sometimes appearing as Īśvaradeva, i.e., Śiva. Achieving the summit of this mountain is a quest, but if reached, that Bodhisattva grants all wishes.

[35] The answer may lie in the nature of the btsan-po's *thugs*, which certainly cannot be understood on the basis of its early Indic equivalents in the MV and the *Dag yig Za ma tog*, i.e., *manas* and *citta*. As we see in some other examples of honorific vocabulary, equivalents from another culture cannot be expected to transmit cultural values. Such may, however, happen when equivalents are created to communicate more specific concepts, such as MV#641, *thugs sras* = *aurasa*. Here, we see clear reference to an innate relationship between two people based on an internal, spiritual compatibility which seems close to the political meaning of *thugs* in the Imperial period.

In Chapter Two, n. 31, we saw that the *thugs*, like the *sku* of the btsan-po, had dimension, was elastic, and could be "infected" or damaged. It was immaterial (but had physical qualities), as was the *sku*, and presumably had the same occult nature. If the latter represented the btsan-po as equivalent of the Imperium, the *thugs* represented the core of his functioning person. Perhaps it was the faculty, for want of a better term, wherein the *gtsug lag* of his ancestors resided as his guide. It certainly was meant as some sort of guiding principle, which is why mistakes in governance were attributed to the *thugs* being affected by a *gdon* or *bdud*. The qualities applied to it in Old Tibetan literature show that we cannot consider it essentially a "psychological" concept, despite the earliest Sanskrit equivalents—especially since we have no idea what sort of psychological concepts were employed at the court of the Imperium—although such ideas may have been incorporated in it. One gets an idea of its capacities in phrases such as *thugs stobs che*, *thugs dgyes pa*, and *thugs la 'phrul mnga*.

As an institution, the Sku Bla remains the least well understood force behind the Imperium. As an attribute of the btsan-pos, *thugs* may be the least understood. The mystery surrounding it complements our general lack of understanding about how a "mountain cult" may have worked, or how a btsan-po may have claimed relationship with a spiritual being. *thugs* is brought forward here as a potential explanation. If a *bdud* or *gdon* could disarrange a btsan-po through his *thugs*, then so could a higher spiritual being. Indeed, this is at the heart of the terms *yi dam* and *thugs dam*. The first refers to the spiritual being seen from the point of view of the vow made to it to achieve a goal; the latter term, more than simply being an honorific equivalent, expresses that the btsan-po has put the direction of his being under control of it through the vow he took. For a close variation in the Cambodian world, see the next note.

[36] We refer here to what has been called the "cult of the *devarāja*" in the Khmer civilization of ancient Cambodia. According to current thinking, the term refers to a procedure of ritual consecration rather than an established "cult" with physical accoutrements, save for the *liṅgam*, which represents the presence of Śiva. To explain the situation simply, the royal political theology there seems to have been a triangulation between the ruler, Śiva as the principle of rule (*devarāja*), and what is in Hindu terms the *sūkṣmāntarātman*, the 'subtle inner self' of the ruler, that were united in the *liṅgam*. (On this political theology at Angkor and elsewhere, see, e.g., Cœdes, *op. cit.* n. 34, p. 61, and Hermann Kulke, *Kings and cults*, p. 288 and 340ff.) J.G. de Casparis, in "The dual nature of Barabuḍur" (Barabudur: history and significance of a Buddhist monument. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 67f, has pointed out that, as in so many other instances, Buddhism as a support of a cult of rulers in Java included a cult of royal ancestors with a family-centered spiritual center.

This gives us a functional similarity between Barabuḍur and Bsam-yas. If the former was also, as asserted by some and cited in the article of de Casparis (p. 68), "a Buddhist equivalent of the *liṅga* as a symbol of supreme authority", we can speculate that Bsam-yas was valued by Khri Srong Lde Brtsan as both a center of protection for his *thugs* as well as the seat of a family-centered cultus.

It is thus not much of a stretch to imagine connections between btsan-pos and images of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas—drawn by the Sangha—as part of the process whereby the emperor pledged his *thugs* to that figure. Details about such a transformation can be found at PT016.34r4. Following gifts to the new De-ga G.yu Tshal and a *smon lam* that Ral-pa-can makes, this is the result: *Bod chen po 'phrul kyï lha btsan po sku la byïnd chags / thugs la 'phrul mnga' ba*…, "Glory was born on Great Tibet, the Ancestor of Transformation, the Btsan-po, the *sku*; his *thugs* possessed transformation…" (Each of these elements encompasses the other, in order.) These passages, also quoted in n. 31, state that this was a moment when Ral-pa-can gained even more power as a ruler by being like Mount Meru, etc., and being possessed of virtues which, as suggested above, implies the presence of Avalokiteśvara. In other words, his *thugs* was taking on those qualities and thus increasing his power.

In the *Sba bzhed* traditions we find detailed descriptions of ritual processes in the building of Bsam-yas which contain information that complements the PT016 narration. We learn more about old ideas surrounding *thugs*, as well as about a rite called here *sta gon*, otherwise known as *byin gyis rlob pa*, the process of *adhiṣṭhāna* or 'Blessing', by which one meditates on oneself as a spiritual being and obtains its qualities. Here are two passages on these points, from SBA BZHED.1982.38 and .39:

de nas Rgyal-pos Slob Dpon la lha khang gi rmang 'ding bar zhus pas / Slob Dpon [i.e., Śāntarakṣita] *gyi zhal nas / rgyal po byang chub tu thugs bskyed pa yang Jo-mo Sgrol-ma yin / mtha' ma Sang Rgyas rtsa na yang Rdo Rje Gdan du chos kyi 'khor lo bskor bar gsol ba 'debs pa yang Jo-mos byed pa yin / da lta rgyal po thugs dam bzhengs pa'i bar chad sel ba yang Jo-mos mdzad pa yin pas*…

In this scenario, Śāntarakṣita informs Khri Srong Lde Brtsan that, before construction can begin, "Oh King, causing your *thugs* to be oriented toward *bodhi* is also (the work of) Tārā. Before enlightenment was finally achieved,* Tārā also caused (the Buddha) to cast a prayer to turn the Wheel of the Dharma at Vajrāsana. Now, Oh King, because obstructions have been removed for the construction [of her image, *thugs dam*], and also because of action by Tārā…"

* The sense of this passage is better understood in the reading at SBA BZHED. 2000.65. The point is to illustrate how Tārā induced Buddha to turn the Wheel of the Dharma at Vajrāsana in an earlier time, as a model for Khri Srong Lde Brtsan.

This passage shows *thugs* to be a subtle connection between the btsan-po and the image, where it represents the seat of his vow to Tārā, who then becomes his *thugs dam*. This is one Buddhist method which seems equivalent, as a mechanism, to the way the subtle essences of Śiva and the Khmer kings were united in the *liṅgam*.

Bod kyi lugs su bgyid pa'i dpe Bod 'bangs kun tshogs pa las nang na gzugs bzang pa Khu Stag Tshas la dpe byas te / gtso bo la Arya-pā-lo Khar-sa-pā-ṇi bzhengs / Rma Sa Kong la dpe byas te Arya-pâ-lor Rta Mgrin sgo srung du byas / Thang Bzang Stag Lod la dpe byas te Arya-pā-lo'i sprul pa yi ge drug pa g.yas su byas / Lha-mo'i dpe bud med la mdzes pa Lcog Ro Gza' Lha-bu Sman la dpe bgyis te Sgrol-ma g.yon du byas / Lcog Ro Bza' Nu Chung la dpe byas te Lha-mo 'Od-zer-can g.yon du byas / kun tshar lags nas Rgyal-pos yo byad sta gon mdzad de / gral nyi shu dgu'i gdugs la zhal bsro zhu ba'i tshe / Slob Dpon gyis mchod pa bsham du gsol te / nam bsros pa dang / lha khang gi steng Arya-pā-lo'i steng nas 'od nyi ma shar ba tsam cig je che je che byung nas Brag Dmar phu mda' zla ba shar ba bzhin 'od kyis khyab par snang /

Better evidence cannot be found that the nobility enjoyed roles—literally—of leadership in the Buddhist community in Tibet during the Imperium. This passage is more interesting, however, as mentioning rites also found in the consecration of De-ga G.yu Tshal Monastery in PT016. The phrase of interest here is *kun tshar lags nas Rgyal-pos yo byad sta gon mdzad de*…, "When the groundwork was laid, Khri Srong made ready the materials and preparations…" What does 'preparations' mean here? Since the passages which immediately follow this describe the descent of a light,

Amitābha, as a symbolic statement of his intention (*dgongs pa*) to take Tibet into his care (leading to Avalokiteśvara doing the same?), the 'preparations' paved the way for this. These included the creation of statues, but not Bsam-yas itself, which was yet to be built. We assume, then, that among the 'preparations' was a process whereby the btsan-po was brought into close relationship with the qualities of that Buddha. This understanding is based on the fact that *sta gon* as the 'rite of preparation' (*sta gon gyi cho ga*) includes various sorts of preparatory acts. (See Mkhas Grub Rje's *Rgyud sde bzhi'i rnam gzhag* in *Introduction to Buddhist Tantric systems*. Mouton: The Hague, 1968, pp. 136f and 284f.) In other sources, it also means *rab gnas* or 'consecration'. [*Bod Rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*.3092.]

When reading the narrative at *Sba bzhed*.1982.38f, one sees a similarity with the preparatory acts described at Mkhas Grub Rje, p. 284f. 'Preparation of the earth goddess' encompasses the examination of the earth and other *sa dpyad* procedures. 'Preparation of the *maṇḍala* deities' would involve the creation of the statues, including those with their human models, in the case of Bsam-yas as a *maṇḍala*. The blessing of the effort by Amitābha's appearance does not fit into a preparatory stage. The narrative makes it clear that, however, as far as Śāntarakṣita was concerned, all this preparation fell into the *bodhicittotpāda* stage through reliance on Tārā (*btsan po khyed dang po byang chub tu sems bskyed pa'i dge ba'i bshes gnyen Lha-mo Sgrol-mas byas*, in SBA BZHED.1982.39).

The *Sba bzhed* therefore presents us with examples of the way in which a ruler could use a ritual, guided by the Sangha, here not in the person of Padmasambhava, master of Tantra, but in the person of Śāntarakṣita, an ordained monk. If this narrative has any historical foundation, it is an example of how an ancient consecration rite involving circumscription of a circle was part of a Buddhist value system. In the *Sba bzhed* this motif is more importantly a template for how Sanghas could help later rulers attain the same goals as had the btsan-pos. In this case, it was the building of a *vihāra* meant to represent both family and nobility within a Buddhist comsos.

[37] There is support for the assertion, made above, that *lha ri* is a categorical term, and may even have been an honorific categorical term in some circumstances, meaning that it is difficult to gauge specific ritual or religious values attached to it. Ariane MacDonald cites ("Une lecture…", p. 296f) that a text in AFL speaks of these sorts of mountains: *lha ri*, *sman ri*, and *byang ri*. (Unfortunately, I have not been able to find this data in the location she cited for it in AFL.) *bla ri* is presented as another such categorical term; cf. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and demons of Tibet*, p. 482f.

If, indeed, this is the case, then what difference is there between a *lha ri* and a *bla ri*? If they are, indeed, only honorific descriptors, should we attach any specific religious function or values to them? Certainly it is not being asserted that all these sorts of mountains have their own cultic structures. Did any of them?

[38] BU CHOS.716: *'Brom rigs lha yis rab btags pa / 'dus byas skad la rje'u rigs yin / de 'dra'i skyes mchog dam pa yis / lha ri'i mgul du rgyal ba yi / rdo rje gdan khri legs bshams te / lha yi snang bar lha rnams kyi / phun sum tshogs pa'i gdan khri bshams / lha yi gos kyis brgyan bar byas / mi yi snang bar mi yul gyi / phun sum tshogs pa'i gdan bshams te / mi yi gos mchog bde bar gsol / lha dang mi yi mchod rdzas rnams / lhun po'i phyogs bzhir gling ltar bkod / nam mkha' 'ja' yi gur gyis phub…*

"The 'Brom family is one strongly connected by [its ancestral] *lha*. In Sanskrit, it is of the *Kṣatriya*-caste. Excellent people such as these well arrange their throne, the Vajrâsana of the Jina, on the shoulder of their *lha ri*. They arrange a throne perfect for the gods, [even] in the view of the gods themselves. They are made to be dressed in the clothes of the gods. Arranging a throne which is perfect in the human world, in the view of human beings, people offer them for their happiness the most excellent of human clothing. The materials for offering of both gods and human beings are arranged like the continents to the four directions from Mount Meru; the sky is covered by a rainbow-tent…"

A few comments. Of course, the assertion of a Kṣatriya lineage connects the 'Brom both with the caste of Śākyamuni, and may also relate to the expected warrior past of a noble clan. The nearly seemless way in which *lha* is used, actually in three different modes here simultaneously, is a classic example of the assimilation of Buddhist elements with Tibetan values in transitional literature: *lha* as ancestral spirit, as well as protector-resident above a mountain in the 'Brom homeland, and then as a *deva* in a heaven consistent with Buddhist literature and cosmology. Vajrāsana is significant because, according to doctrine, there is one 'seat of the Buddha's teaching' in each cardinal direction, and this is the one in the north. It is a valid throne for representatives of the Buddha to rule from.

[39] MA .NI BKA' 'BUM.189r3ff: *de'i tshe Bod na rje 'bangs kyi rnam dbye med pa las / Śākya'i rigs la Śākya Chen-po dang / Śākya Li-tsa-byi dang / Śākya Ri-brags-pa dang gsum las / tha ma la Rgyal-po Skyabs Seng zhes bya ba'i bu chung ba cig dpung gi tshogs dang bcas pa gangs can gyi phyogs su bros pa las / Bod yul du bslebs nas Yar Lung Lha Ri Rol-pa'i rtse nas / lha skas las btsan sgo bzhir babs pa dang / gnam nas 'ongs pa'i btsan po cig 'dug pas rang cag rnams kyi rjer zhu'o zer nas gnya' bar khri la bteg ste rgyal por bkur pas Rje Gnya' Khri Btsan-po zhes grags so.*

There are many observations that could be made about this passage. Note, again, the motif wherein Tibet was in a political and social state of harmony (*dbye med pa*) before the arrival of the btsan-pos. The reference to the "Śākya Licchavi" may actually go back to traditions from the court of Srong Btsan Sgam-po. Tibetans might have been motivated to emphasize a mythological connection between them and the Newari Dynasty to the south to enhance their status as inheritors of the Buddha's teachings. This tradition is one of several (including the descent of Tibetans from Avalokiteśvara and the Rock Ogress) which substituted, in the Phyi Dar, for whatever uniting principle the Imperium had provided to unite the Tibetan peoples.

Also, because the Imperium was long past, Phyi Dar Buddhists had to explain why btsan-pos had appeared in the first place. Here, they are presented as a response to an imminent invasion of Tibet by the son of Rgyal-po Skyabs Seng of the Śākya Ri-sbrags-pa, who was fleeing there with an army. This calls for the appearance of a btsan-po from Yar Lung Lha Ri. This *might* be intended to be a substitute-equivalent for Lha Ri Gyang Do in De-mo in Rkong-po, *if* we accept an institutional memory of that peak earlier mentioned in the Rkong-po inscription, and *if* it is accepted that an imperial spiritual being, a *lha*, could move from one peak to another. (Certainly not an impossibility.) However, it seems that what we really have here is an essential re-definition of the idea of descent. The *lha ri* itself is now qualified by *rol pa*, a Hindu and Buddhist term for the playing of a role on the phenomenal plane. It has become the play of an event whose reality lies on a spiritual plane. *sgo bzhir 'babs* shows how this Yar Lung Lha Ri was being assimilated with Mount Meru as the source of the Ganga, etc. Even though the motif of descent from heaven is preserved, these emendations and the folk-etymology of Gnya' Khri Btsan-po's reign name tell us that original traditions have been lost, and even the idea of btsan-po as rescuer is presented in a way that accords with the incarnation of a Bodhisattva or the arrival of a *deva* in classical Hindu culture.

[40] See also the description of the 'mountain cult' sketched out in the Nasik cave inscription translated in Sylvain Levi, "La suite des idées dans les textes sanscrits" (*Mémorial Sylvain Lévi*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), p. 300, reprinted from *Cinquantenaire de l'École des Hautes-Études. Sciences philologiques*, 1921, pp. 91–99). This Prakrit inscription, dated to the mid-second century CE, is a praise of the Sātavāhana ruler Gotamīputa. It begins by stating that, in essence, this ruler is like Himavat, Meru, or Mandara. As with these and other great mountains, he sustains the world. This explains why it is significant that we then find an enumeration of the mountain chains within his kingdom over which he rules, and he is, in effect, praised as the lord of chains such as the Vidabha and Malaya. Cosmologically and politically,

he occupies a position *above* these mountain chains. His nature is, logically, that of a great mountain, and his "seat", as it were, is again not *on* or *in* the mountains, but hovering over them. This accords especially closely with Śaivite and Tibetan concepts that the courts of the gods hover over mountains—Kailas being the foremost example. Some Buddhist data agrees with this, especially several strikingly similar passages in PT016/IO751, such as Ral-pa-can being "like Mount Meru". A continuity of concepts is clear.

Since such ideas were known at courts in northern India in the first half of the first millennium, it may help explain why both Avalokiteśvara and Śiva took on some of their well-known characteristics. This seems to be a matter of religious reality being formed within the gravitational pull of court beliefs and attitudes.

[41] We mentioned above the absence of evidence for a "mountain cult" in Imperial-period documents, and, indeed, for any Dunhuang document we have, *pace* the position of Karmay. When we survey Phyi Dar materials, such as the texts of *bsangs* rites involving mountains (*lha ri*, which, again, may be an honorific phrase in many cases), we find no detailed knowledge of, or reference to, Imperial-period ritual realities. In fact, the occasional reference we find to mountains having their own courts (*'khor*), queens, etc., may argue otherwise. In addition to simply being another symbolical hierarchy, as explained above, it could even be a replacement for the courts of the Imperium, a religio-mythological complex that arose in its place. Using the court as a model, it provided yet another transcendent political structure which took the place of the centralized power of the Imperial court and returned power to its traditional center, the clans.

Wherever else we look in written materials, we find a similar paucity of data pointing to an organized "mountain cult". Tshe-dbang Nor-bu's *Bod Rje Lha Btsan-po'i gdung rabs Mnga'-ri[s] smad Gung Thang du ji ltar byung ba'i tshul Deb ther Dwangs shel 'phrul gyi me long* mentions (p. 90) a mountain chain called Rje'u Lha Btsan in Gung Thang, but no connection with local beliefs is given. (Which is strange, after all, since it is a narrative about Gung Thang.) Much more significant is the data in Sle Lung Bzhad-pa'i-rdo-rje, *Dam can Bstan Sruṅ rgya mtsho'i rnam par thar pa chas śas tsam brjod pa Sṅon med legs bśad*, v. 1, pp. 337 and 343. This is a classic study of local Tibetan spiritual beings, and is filled with cosmological and mythological lore. 'Od De Gung Rgyal (not 'O Lde Spu Rgyal, the form of the name in the inscriptions) is provided some context here, amidst a plethora of spiritual beings. (The switch from 'O to 'Od allows the introduction of photistic elements and provides a popular explanation for his name.) Beliefs about it are presented as part of Bon tradition and cosmology. There is nothing said about beliefs about mountains, however, nor is there any realistic reference to Imperial-period beliefs. (This includes the mandala-like orientation on p. 343 which relates it to the Yab Bla Brdal Drug, which also is not spelled as in the Rkong-po inscription.) We may conclude that there is no tradition identifying 'O Lde Spu Rgyal with a mountain in Old Tibetan materials, nor is one asserted in the most authoritative Phyi Dar materials. Indeed, the statements in the CHRONICLE [DTH.81] referring to Yar Lha Sham-po having the status of a *gtsug gi lha*, or *Yar Lha ni Sham-po mkhyen* [DTH.119] represents the extent of truly old—but still post-Imperial—data.

There are reasons for believing that the most important motifs today about mountains in Tibet developed during the early Phyi Dar. It is in this period that we actually find a clear nexus between religious beliefs and the values of mountains. One example is at BU CHOS.588: *Jo-bo'i zhal nas / gangs ri'i mgon po gangs ri ltar dkar ba / gangs ri lhun po'i 'od zer rab 'phros pas / ri phran nag po'i phyogs rnams skrag par byed / snying rje cher bskyed khro bor ma mdzad cig / Rgyal-ba Lha Rgyal Mgon-po thugs rje can / gangs ri gdol ba'i yul der smin mdzad nas / rje la thugs brtse Mu Stegs gdugs bcom mod*… Here we see further evidence of Avalokiteśvara synthesized with Śiva—the lord of snowy mountains, white as a glacier—which is mixed here with a concern about the Mu Stegs-pa, non-Buddhists who rival the Bon-po as adversaries of Chos in early Phyi

Dar Buddhist literature. This passage is another example how, perhaps more than any other significant early Phyi Dar document, the *Bu chos* presents a spiritual ecology for Tibet—a new direction for that country—and this provides a function for mountains which are, actually, spiritual beings. At BU CHOS.764 we encounter a related belief, that of Avalokiteśvara as Śiva Paśupati, the lord of animals in the mountains, *yi dwags rnams kyi mgon po*. Similar expressions are found in the *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum*.

[42] Examples include the *Mdo Dzangs blun*, an apocryphal Sutra which has been asserted to have been originally composed in Khotanese and which became very popular for its political contents in the early Phyi Dar. It is already quoted in the Sba bzhed. Another is the *Suvarṇabhāsasūtra*, translated during the Snga Dar and quoted frequently by the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682). Early Dge-lugs-pa appreciation of the latter work coincided with the rise of the popularity of this work in Mongolia. It is considered the central work of Buddhist *rājaśāstra* in that culture. On this see Sh. Bira, "Монголд Алтангэрэл сурдыг тахин шүтэж ирсэн нь = The worship of the Suvarṇaprabhāsottama-sūtra in Mongolia". *Монголын түүх, хоёл, түүх бичлэгийн судалгаа*. Ulaanbaatar: Олон Улсын Монгол Судлалын Холбоо, 1977–2001, vol. 3, pp. 297–306 and 322–331. Other Sutras of significance could be brought forward, not to speak of Tantric and near-Tantric literature such as the *Mañjuśrīmūlakālpa* or the *Kālacakratantra*s.

In point of fact, political concepts, or those with political applications, are found in nearly every significant Sutra and Tantra. And, where these are not obvious, as in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, such works still end up possessing political value. In some cases, this outweighs their doctrinal value.

[43] Cf. here especially Ernst Waldschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1950–1951 (= Abhandlungen der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Klasse für Sprachen, Literatur und Kunst, Jahrgang 1949–1950), still the standard edition from the extant versions.

Immediately after the soil of Bsam-yas is deemed propitious for its construction (see the passage in the next note), the *Sba bzhed* informs us that other sources assert Śāntarakṣita told Khri Srong Lde Brtsan that he should now set about suppressing obstructions, so he established the four famous stupas there (*gzhan yang bgegs mnan dgos zhes kyang gsungs nas / mchod rten bzhi'i bla phur btab*). Is this a narrow reference to a successful conclusion of the construction of the monastery, or is it a broader reference that the btsan-po has now been recognized as a legitimate Buddhist monarch, i.e., a Cakravartin? Paranavitana observed (at "Ploughing as a ritual of royal consecration in ancient Ceylon", pp. 31 and 36) that immediately after the ploughing ceremony in both the *Dīpavaṃsa* and the *Mahābhārata* (which contains a similar rite), the ruler is advised by his spiritual advisors that he is now in a position to destroy his enemies. He has been consecrated as a "victorious monarch", who actually now has the duty (the *Dharma*) to remove them. There is no reason to believe that the *bgegs* referred to here are only spiritual impediments, since the *Sba bzhed* is not sparing in its description of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's human enemies.

[44] SBA BZHED.1982.37f: *khru gang khru bzhi phyin pa dang / 'bras dkar mo dang nas dkar mo phul do tsam ma 'dres par 'dug / gram pa dang / gyo mo dang / rus pa dang / sol ba lta bu ni ma byung / sa zhag skya nar mo gcig byung nas 'jor bzhag / de la Mkhan-po Bo-dhi-satva rab tu dgyes te / btsan po'i dbu la phyugs* [*byugs*] *nas / pha la pha la si ti si ti gsungs pas / de btsan pos ma go nas*...

Of course, the motif of Khri Srong "not understanding" the Indic phrase is probably intended to illustrate his dependence upon a Sangha, here in the person of Śântarakṣita. Such dependence is a standard element in later Tibetan historiography in describing the relationship between btsan-pos and their Sanghas at court. Is it simply a literary motif? This is a difficult question to ask when it comes to specific events and rites. We note that the above narrative accords with an earlier description in the *Dīpavaṃsa*, *et al.*, in which Devanampiyatissa is guided by monks newly arrived from India in the

Sri Lankan version of the same rite. [S. Paranavitana. "Ploughing as a ritual of royal consecration in ancient Ceylon", p. 31.] In other words, Khri Srong Lde Brtsan cannot understand what he is being told because it is a political rite being newly introduced from a court in India or Nepal.

[45] Paul Mus was convinced that the MPNS was, essentially, the text of a coronation ritual. In other words, it was the creation of a Sangha, and was intended to enhance a ruler by bringing his court and empire into a Buddhist cosmology. This is perfectly in accord with many examples we have seen of "political Buddhism" at courts. Mus may well have been correct in his assessment of the MPNS; there are reasons for believing that elements of it were presented as such even at the time Bsam-yas was being planned. It is certainly not chronologically implausible. (It is listed in the Ldan Dkar-ma catalogue. On the chronology of its translation, see J. Takasaki, "On the *Myaṅ 'das*". *Contributions on Tibetan and Buddhist religion and philosophy*, ed. by Ernest Steinkellner and Helmut Tauscher. Wien: Arbeitskreis für tibetische und buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 1983, v. 2, pp. 285–292.). Also, one particular characteristic of the rite described in the *Sba bzhed* supports its use there by the Sangha (i.e., Śāntarakṣita).

The occurence of *sa zhag* compels us to consider this. Although it renders *pṛthivī-parvataka*, 'petroleum', at MV#5287, functionally we must see it here as the intended equivalent of *rasadhātu* at MPNS.78 or *pṛthivīrasa* (which is usually rendered *sa bcud*). In the sixth chapter of the MPNS it is also described as *mar gyi snying po/sa khrag*, an earth-essence, a substance which looks like fresh butter and tastes like honey (MPNS.78). This description is readily captured by the term *sa zhag*, 'earth fat'. It is a nutritive essence in the earth which is released by a Cakravartin and can also be found by a Tathāgata (cf. the quote from the MPNS in E. Waldschmidt. "Wunderkräfte des Buddha". *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*. 1948.48–91; cf. p. 81). See here also data in Appendix I.

This 'earth fat' is found for the benefit of sentient beings as one example of the benevolence of a righteous ruler. It is also an expression of the magical connection between that ruler and the earth of the kingdom which is rightfully his. How these beliefs might be connected with the motif of the golden wheel in the center of the earth (see n. 1 of this chapter and Appendix I) is unknown.

The inclusion of this motif in the *Sba bzhed* narrative, if it is historical, shows that the Sangha at Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's court was following a ritual consecration tradition connected with the MPNS. Since the goal of such rites in the MPNS was, following Mus, the coronation of a Buddhist monarch/Cakravartin, we must conclude that this was the reason for including these rites in the construction of Bsam-yas. Thus, not only was Bsam-yas to be a complex wherein Khri Srong Lde Brstan, his family, and the leaders of noble clans who supported him achieved an apotheosis as Buddhist spiritual beings, it also was to be the residence and court of a Cakravartin. One reason that we do not learn more about this complex of beliefs may be that the reigns of his successors, Sad-na Legs and Ral-pa-can, show no evidence of employing this strategy. Neither built a monastery which was a Bsam-yas for them, and in inscriptions from their reigns Bsam-yas has no special significance. We have already remarked on the difference in function between Bsam-yas and De-ga G.yu-tshal.

[46] Hermann Kulke (in *Kings and cults*, pp. 289 and 334) describes both the process and the motive behind a Cakravartin ritual probably held in Cambodia in 802. The motive for the rite seems to have been the desire of the ruler, Jayavarman II, to unite Kambuja and to keep it independent of Java. Could a similar ritual for Khri Srong Lde Brtsan have been an effort to achieve the unification of the fractious elements of Tibetan polity, since he had not been able to do this with his status as btsan-po?

[47] The final statement in the edict, just before the list of those taking the oath, reads: *Ra-sa'i 'Phrul Snang gtsug lag khang dang / Khra 'Brug gi Bkra-shis Lha Yul gtsug lag khang dang / pho brang 'khor gyi dge 'dun dang / Ra-sa'i Rgya Btags Ra-mo Che dang / Brag Dmar-gyi Khams Gsum Mi Ldog Sgrol dang Bru-sha yul dang / Zhang Zhung yul*

dang / Mdo Smad dang / sde blon ris dang /'di rnams kyi gtsug lag khang gi dge 'dun pa dpe re re 'chang du stsal to. [DPA'-BO.1985.372; part of this passage was referred to in Chapter One, n. 4.] In addition to being a formal statement about where copies of the full-length edict were dispatched, this tells us that Khri Srong was consciously uniting the Sanghas of these temples and regions under his leadership at Bsam-yas. Delivering a copy of this edict to his court monks (*pho brang 'khor gyi dge 'dun*) would seem unnecessary, unless he was changing his political residence, and the Sangha that he was closest to would be changing location with him. The longer and more closely we look at Bsam-yas, the clearer it seems that it was meant to serve as a court and a political center of power for Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, not a refuge from his political functions, as *vihāra*s often were. This again helps explain why members of the nobility modelled for statues there, and why he engaged in rites, with his family members, explicitly aimed at supporting his consecration as a Cakravartin. The bonds created went beyond those of the earlier political relationships at Tibetan courts between Sanghas and btsan-pos that we know of.

We do have sufficient secondary data to indicate that this was most likely how Khri Srong Lde Brtsan spent his latter days of rule, and that there was a model for this behavior. Let us compare motifs in the *Sba bzhed* and the MPNS with those in the *Mahābodhivaṃsa*. In the latter work, Devanampiyatissa, along with his family, circumscribed his capital city with a plough in an act preliminary to his consecration. The city, of course, contained both his Sangha and other monasteries, as well as his residence (court). After his consecration, he resided in the monastery there. (See S. Paranavitana. "Ploughing as a ritual of royal consecration in ancient Ceylon", p. 32.) For some time after its construction, Khri Srong Lde Brtsan resided in Bsam-yas, according to the *Sba bzhed*. Therefore, it became his court and *de facto* capital city. Did it ever lose this status for him?

[48] See J. Matisoff, *Handbook of Proto-Tibeto-Burman*, p. 616: **tsan* is the 'proto-form', yielding *b-tsan 'strong/firm'. On p. 260, he identifies the Proto-Lolo-Burmese form as **zan*. It goes without saying here that we do not at all understand either the literal or metaphorical meaning of *btsan po* as a title from such data. We cannot derive meanings from usages when we are in a loop because we have posited a stem, and defined it, in terms of the only known derivative it has.

Also, since the term is not found in Benedict's *Sino-Tibetan: a conspectus*, it would seem that neither author considers the term to be 'Sino-Tibetan'.

Just as important as this data is the observation of Berthold Laufer, published in "Bird divination among the Tibetans" in 1914: "...where the text offers *bdag žaṅ lon-du oṅ-bar ston*...The word *lon*, accordingly, is written without the prefix *b*. The way of writing cannot be considered an anomaly, but exactly corresponds to the pronunciation of the word at that period, as we established on the basis of the transcription *lun* [論] (= Tib. *blon*) furnished by the Annals of the T'ang Dynasty...and the inscription of 822. The word *btsan*, the title of the kings of Tibet, was likewise sounded *tsan*, as evidenced by the Chinese transcription *tsan* [贊]. The prefixed media *b*, accordingly, is not an integral part of these two stems, but an additional prefix which must have a grammatical function; and this, in my opinion, is that it forms *nomina actionis*, in a similar manner as it designates a past action in connection with verbal roots. The stem *tsan* means 'powerful, warlike, heroic;' *b-tsan*, 'one having the title or dignity of *tsan*'; *b-lon*, 'one who has the function of, or acts as, minister.'"

While we should always pay great attention to Laufer's observations, we should note the lack of attestation of other forms from the stems he describes above (**tsan*, **lon*). Again, it is logically problematic to reconstruct a stem from a single derivative, or none. We may help here, in one example, by suggesting the nominal *lon*, which still today means 'notice' or 'message'. I assume Laufer passed by this because, as so many others, he was influenced by the early matching of the title *blon po* with 'minister', Skt. *mantrin* or *āmātya*. The Tang sources give the same impression, despite the fact that

military leaders and others sometimes are pictured performing ministerial functions, such as concluding treaties. *Perhaps* the first and most important function of the blon-pos was to bring intelligence and messages back and forth among clans, local leaders, and the court. After all, the blon-pos were mostly representatives of leading families and clans at the court. This is why we have rendered *blon* here by 'advisor'. When the Imperium went international, their function naturally expanded (*nang blon*, *phyi blon*). Given our sketchy knowledge of Tibetan court structure, we should not depend overmuch on foreign equivalents.

Laufer may well be right in the quote above. We should add, however, that unknown to him we have both the forms *btsan* and *brtsan* in Imperial-period documents. Since we do not clearly understand the reason for this alternation in prefixes, we cannot unqualifiedly assert a stem **tsan-* (we only assume that this is a stem underlying these derivatives) at this point.

49 There is no compelling reason to see a *btsan* spirit behind the power of the *lha b*[*r*]*tsan po*, both because we have no evidence for this, and because the inscriptions themselves state that *lha* are their ancestors and the seat of their power. On the other hand, one way to make sense of the apposed title *lha b*[*r*]*tsan po* would be to assume a union of spiritual beings in one figure, although this is not otherwise known in Tibetan religion. (The incarnating of *one* spiritual being is quite common.) The metaphorical and symbolic value of the *dbu rmog*, and the use of helmets in mediumship in Tibet later, suggest that the btsan-pos were literally taken over by a warrior spirit when preparing for battle. This is the only argument in favor of connecting *lha* with *btsan*. We should bear in mind, though, that the *btsan* spirits of today may well have been modelled on the characters of the btsan-pos, rather than the other way around, just as, e.g., *dge bsnyen* spirits were modelled on this Buddhist category.

50 There may be an Indo-European model behind this two-fold aspect of rule. Already in the Ṛg Veda, for example, we have an ancient term for ruler, *rāṭ*, while the Ṛg Veda also knows the *viśpati*, "master of the clan", as well as the *viśāṃ viśpatiḥ*, "the clan-lord of clans". The latter seems especially similar to the office of btsan-po, who was elected by clan-lords who had formed a comitatus, as described in the *Chronicle*.

This distinction may help explain why several times we find the phrase *myi'i rgyal po* in the inscriptions, but not *myi'i btsan po*: The principle function of the btsan-po was as war leader and maintainer of a comitatus, while that of rgyal-po was as a day-to-day ruler. (I do believe that, as we near the end of the Imperium, we can see rgyal-po begin to surpass btsan-po. This would have been a function of one or both factors: The growing influence of Buddhism at court, or the need for a ruler who was more an administrator and leader of an empire than a warrior/military leader.)

51 The material in the following paragraphs on [*g*]*nong*[*s*] largely follows the discussion in M. Walter, "The persistence of ritual…," p. 180f.

A perusal of Jäschke shows us the range of meanings of what has by now become formative stems in two moods, *nong-* and *gnong-*. The former currently means, in addition 'to die', 'to commit a fault, to make a mistake, to commit oneself'; the latter, 'to be conscious of one's guilt; to feel remorse'. Nominals that are most likely derivatives are associated with each; for the former we have *nongs pa*, resp., 'no more alive, dead'. The discussion here assumes that the verbs *nong*[*s*] and *gnong* descended from a common root, and thus originally had coordinated meanings. This has yet to be demonstrated with any certainty.

There is also an attested early use of *nongs* in a phrase in which its use is perhaps related to 'to commit a fault', etc. This occurs in the Zhol Inscription, where it describes an offence to the Imperium of less severity than outright disloyalty (*btsan po zha sngar / glo ba ma rïngs na / nongs myig gzhan cï byung yang rung / srog srid la myï dbab par*… at LI & COBLIN.148; *nongs myig* is rendered by *nyes dmigs* at BRDA DKROL.403). However, since *nongs myig* is a *hapax legomenon*, its meaning remains a matter of conjecture, and this passage will not be considered further in this discussion.

[52] *thugs nongs* is the most common compound involving *nongs*. It is usually considered an honorific expression for 'to die', as in BRDA DKROL.292 (and at BOD KYI.51), whose author cites the Zhwa'i Lha Khang inscription passage quoted below. This definition, however, does not fit the contexts of the passages it occurs in. Also, *nongs* is already an honorific verb; it is unnecessary to attach a prefix to it to create another, equivalent honorific term for 'to die'.

These citations in LI & COBLIN suffice to illustrate that *thugs nongs* cannot mean 'to die': From the Treaty inscription, two occurences: (p. 49, line 32): *dmag stongs kyis phan thogs par byas pa dang // phan tshun [thu]gs nongs byung ngo chog na / dgyes snang dag kyang ma tshad par bsris te / 'dï ltar nye zhïng gnyen ba yïn na / dbon zhang gï tshul kho na ltar // thugs yï dam phabs pa las*...; p. 50 (line 47): *dbon zhang mold ba'ï rjes kyang tshad ma phyin par / thugs nongs kyis brtsal te / bar gyi gcugs rnying pa phran tshegs kyi dogs phrïg gis / legs pa chen po'i sku don / phyi –igs she dag du gyur nas*... And, from the Zhwa'i Lha Khang inscription (p. 264, line 10): *phyis yab dang gcen thugs nongs brtud par byung ba'ï rjes / nga chab srïd ma bzhes pa'ï skabsu kha cig phan phun dang / gdon stson pa dag yod pa dang / Ban-de Ting-nge-'dzïn kyis nyaṃ drod zin nas / dpend pa'ï bka gros gsold*. (The translations of these passages are on pp. 96–98 and p. 276, respectively. *thugs nongs* is rendered here by 'disagreement', 'fault' and 'misunderstanding', which indicates that we do not clearly understand the use of *nongs* here.)

SBA BZHED.1982 preserves the old spelling *nongs* in all its occurences, as in this example on p. 63, immediately following the passage of Ye-shes Dbang-po quoted in the next note: *mtha' yun du rje 'bangs kyi shul bzang po ni phye / ngan song gsum gyi sgo ni bkag pa la sogs pa yon brtan* [*tan*] *smos kyis mi lang pa cig 'byung bar mdzad pa'i rkyen bkas bskul ba bzhin mdzad na yang mi mangs na / slad rjes su thugs nongs chen po btud mar byung ngas*... "[Understanding this good *chos* of the Buddha to be a medicine for the *sku* and the *chab srid*], open a good road into the far future for rulers and subjects! Because you have spoken virtuously to shut the door to the three evil rebirths, etc., if you act as you have appointed by order (such) support (for the Sangha) to create (the conditions for them,) an inexhaustible support should appear. Even if not much comes forth, subsequently will any great *thugs nongs* appear in succession (for such efforts)?"

thugs nongs is also found in the Treaty Inscription of 821/822, east face, lines 32 (damaged) and 47, where we read: *dbon zhang mold ba'ï rjes kyang tshad ma phyin par / thugs nongs kyis brtsal te*..., i.e., "Although Uncle and Nephew spoke, they were urged on by *thugs nongs* not to arrive at a proper measure (of agreement)..." (LI & COBLIN.50) and the Zhwa'i Lha Khang inscription, west face, line 10, where we read: *phyis yab dang gcen thugs nongs brtud par byung ba'ï rjes // nga chab srïd ma bzhes pa'ï skabsu kha cig phan phun dang / gdon stson pa dag yod pa*... (LI & COBLIN.264), i.e., "Later, following disagreements between my father and elder brother which arose in close succession...", as translated at LI & COBLIN.276.

The meaning of the term comes through, albeit somewhat vaguely, in these examples. The fundamental concept is one of inner disturbance which causes disagreement and argument where there seems no basis for them. This makes sense of using *nongs* as a 'fault' to qualify the *thugs* of the btsan-po. Perhaps all such upsets were considered the work of spirits, as has been discussed in Chapter Two. In any event, since the judgment and attitude of the btsan-pos are the subjects here, we are in a position to assert that *nongs* could be differentiated into those that affected the btsan-po's *sku* and those that affected his *thugs*.

[53] The opposite is also asserted. SBA BZHED.1982.63 shows Ye Shes Dbang-po appealing for support for the Sangha by employing the metaphor, *Sangs Rgyas kyi chos bzang po 'di sku dang chab srid la sman par 'tshal te*... This shows the belief by members of court that employing the proper *chos* could have serious, practical impact upon the function of the Imperium. Khri Srong Lde Brtsan is here to understand that

the good *chos* of the Buddha will be beneficial for both his *sku* and his government in general, while others will not.

[54] The only evidence, and it is tenuous indeed, for the existence of such beliefs for the Imperial period rests on the idea that special efforts may have been made to divine, on the body of the btsan-po—remember the quote in the text about Ral-pa-can—evidence of *nongs*. At PT1288, a section of the ANNALS, line 16, we read: *btsan po myes khrï srong rtsan gyï spur phyïng ba'ï ring khang na' rïng mkhyud chïng bzhugste*... "The corpse of the btsan-po, the ancestor, Khri Srong Rtsan [i.e., Srong Btsan Sgam-po]: Examining the continuing presence (*ring*) of the btsan-po in the presence-house (*ring khang*) of Phying-ba, it resided there..." We also read, in PT1042, discussed above—and unfortunately this is the only Dunhuang text which mentions this—of a *ring mkhan*, presumably one skilled in interpreting signs of political importance about the regnal presence of the btsan-po, his *ring*, which could be divined from his corpse. Given the dual nature of *sku*, it would make sense that it was important to understand the circumstances surrounding the death of a btsan-po. While this is a logical inference, there is no Imperial-period evidence to support it save for the significance of the verb *mkhyud*.

Concerning one possible interpretation of *mkhyud* in this passage, see my "From Old Tibetan *ring* to classical Tibetan *ring bsrel*", p. 66f. The first definition of this verb in Jäschke is "to keep, to hold", and it could simply mean that. However, since we find the verb *bzhugs* immediately following it, it seems repetitious to state that the corpse was kept in the *ring khang* and also resided there. Although we read *mkhyud* here (elsewhere in the *Annals* it is spelled *mkhyïd*, which injects further uncertainty, despite the fact that *i* and *u* frequently alternate) according to the definition in Jäschke, there are references taken from Schiefner at the end of his entry which point to the speculative interpretation above, *viz*., that it refers to an inspection of the body of the btsan-po for signs. Schiefner may have been referring to the tradition of *mkhyud dpyad*, in which hidden (*mkhyud*) signs can be examined for benefit and power, which I refer to in the above article.

[55] In this problematic divination text we see that we are not always dealing with a fatal situation, and various considerations come into play in determining the seriousness of a *nongs*. This agrees with other early sources. As we see at PT1047.27–28: *rgyal pho lo chïg gï bar du cang myi nongs pha'ï ngo / nad pha la btab na sku blas bca' ste lo chig du myi gum pa'i ngo*, and at PT1047.65,67:... *rgyal pho zhal 'tho zhing lo chig gï bar du cang myï nongs pha'ï ngo*... *rgyal pho snyung ba la btab na nï ha chang zhal 'tho ches te myi bzang /*

For lines 27–28, we have no indication at all of a *nongs* within the course of a year, so that, if an illness does strike the ruler, the Sku Bla having confidence in the outcome, it is indicated that he will not die within that year. For lines 65 through 67, we must first understand *zhal 'tho*, an obscure term rendered by A. MacDonald as 'le prestige de la personne royale'. While we may accept her interpretation provisionally, it was probably a more subtle concept, one with more direct reference to the btsan-po's physical appearance; it may even have been a loan word. This passage shows that it appears there will be no *nongs* through the course of a year affecting the ruler's "pride", but if he is struck by an illness (i.e., his *sku* shrinks), it will not be good for him if he expresses his "pride" too much.

Once again, we see a great concern with even nuances of the btsan-po's being and appearance. There at least was a later tradition that his body, his *sku*, was watched for even subtle changes which might affect the Imperium. Passages such as the above may also show that a more general audience was aware of connections between the well-being of a ruler (we assume that some passages referring to *rgyal-pho*s also refer to *btsan-po*s) and *nongs*. This increases the probability, mentioned below here, that there was an organized apparatus at court—never mentioned in such passages, although Imperial period documents, even inscriptions, refer to omens, etc.—which

was charged with the responsibility of examining the body and surroundings of btsan-pos to evaluate positive and negative effects of actions, policies, etc., through markings which appeared on his body and those of others at court. In fact, if the *sku* referred to the Imperium by extension, as has been asserted here, then examining the btsan-po's body would be natural as an application of the *doctrine of signatures*, upon which most prognosticatory systems rest.

[56] As in so many other examples, the following uses of *nongs* in Phyi Dar materials present us with a conundrum: Either these continue the essential, earlier meaning of *nongs* or, so long divorced from the btsan-po and the court, they give us new uses. Either we learn about its deeper meanings during the Imperium, or we see it as reinterpreted to suit later contexts. Most passages clearly show their application to a Phyi Dar world. The quote below, from the *Sba bzhed*, has clues in it which clearly disallow it from reflecting Imperial period realities.

In the *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum* we encounter frequently the phrase *nongs skyon*, by which compound the concept is placed firmly in a Buddhist ethical and ritual environment. On .216v6 we learn that Buddhism knows how to remove the five (*nongs*) *skyon* of Tibet, to wit, *klu'i pho brang,'dre'i 'dun phung dang / ma mo'i nyal sa dang / btsan gyi rgyun srang dang / 'byung ba'i sa dgra'o*. All are spirits of the earth. The intent, which is clear also from the context of this passage, is that Buddhists can prevail over them ritually because Tibet itself, down to its soil, possesses the signs of a country under the leadership of Avalokiteśvara and, through him, a Cakravartin: *yon tan brgyad po ni / gnam 'khor lo rtsibs brgyad kyi 'og / sa padma 'dab brgyad kyi steng / bar bkra shis rtags brgyad kyis brgyan pa*.

Once again, the government of the Imperium had been replaced by an independent Sangha, but here one made up of Tantrics (i.e., *sngags-pa*s). There is little evidence of the highly organized structures the Gsar-ma traditions developed. The *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum* also projects a cryptic spiritual ecology which may have been an inspiration for *sbas yul* symbolism. It is also instructive that the damage of breaking an oath (*dam tshig*) is associated with *nyams pa'i skyon* on .517r/v, but *not* with *nongs*, as it would most likely have been in a document from the Imperial period.

The *Bu chos* frequently refers directly to the dynamic between rule, rulers, and their spiritual advisors (*yab yum dang bla ma*). The necessity of the Sangha is expressed in situations involving *nongs pa mthol*, emphasizing the importance of formal court confessions. *nongs* occurs here almost always in narrations about damaging actions by members of royal families in previous lives and how through confession (*nongs pa mthol*) their spiritual evolution is guaranteed; one example is on p. 95. On pp. 524–5 we have a *tsha tsha* ritual with a *smon lam* which also illustrates the context for fault, its expiation, and the protection of Tibet in Gsar-ma Phyi Dar thinking:... *Jo-bo'i sku dang mnyam pa'i tsha tsha lam pa cig byon gda' / Der Gshegs Gnyen-pa'i zhal nas / tsha tsha'am de ci tsha nga'i snying tsha / nga'i bla ma da dung du mchod rten byed pa sngas gsungs nas / tsha tsha de tsan de blangs nas / dbu thog tu bzhag pas / tsha tsha nyid skol phor du gyur nas / bshes gnyen pa'ang sngar bzhin tsha tsha cig tu gyur to / der Ka-ba-pa rnam pa gsum gyis / kye Rgyal-ba yab sras bdag cag gis nongs na mthol gyis / spyir sems can la thugs rjes gzigs / khyad par du Bod la thugs rjes gzigs / de'i nang nas kyang bdag cag gsum la thugs rjes gzigs shig / ces*... The unvarying message of the *Bu chos* is that rulers and their families will commit *nongs* and require the intercession of *kalyaṇamitra*, i.e., *bla ma*s.

On the other hand, we have the *Sba bzhed* traditions. They give less evidence of having been composed as models for future rulers, although that certainly was in the minds of their compilers as they presented the *bona fides* of their service to the Imperium. The following passage discusses the vicissitudes of the establishment of Buddhism which is such a important topic in Phyi Dar historical works. At SBA BZHED.1982.16 we read: *de nas rje blon la Zhang Nya Bzang / 'Gos Khri Bzang dang / chos la dga' ba'i blon po kun tshogs nas chos bya bar mol gtam byas pa la / Zhang Nya Bzang gis snyan du gsol*

ba /"mes Srong Btsan gyis lha chos mdzad pas Bod du legs dgu byung ba dang / Lha Sras Yab kyi kyang mdzad pa las / Yab nongs pa'i 'og tu Zhang Ma Zhang gis bshig..." The concluding passage informs us that, following the death of Mes Ag Tshoms, Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's father, Zhang Ma Zhang "destroyed" Buddhism. There are two key points which demonstrate that this is the narrative of a Phyi Dar author. First, the hyperbole concerning the loss of Buddhism, which is not attested in any of the works which can be attributed to Khri Srong Lde Brtsan. Second is the use of *nongs* in connection with a btsan-po in which this verb clearly means 'to die'. As we learned above, btsan-pos did not 'die' in Imperial-period works such as the *Annals* and the inscriptions. Rather, they *gdung du gshegs*. Thus, this narrative is faulty with regard to the Imperial period both historically and terminologically.

[57] *nongs* as 'fault' is even asserted for other courts in post-Imperial documents. See the excerpt from the *Li Yul lung bstan pa* quoted at my "The persistence of ritual...", p. 181n.

APPENDIX ONE

THE RELIGIO-POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF GOLD

There is a wealth of corroborative data on the significance of gold in marking political elites in Central Eurasia. This data is important both to situate Imperial Tibet better within the CECC as well as for what it may tell us about an important way Buddhism may have appealed to those elites.

First, as to the corroborative data:

We have a tradition in Byzantine sources of the Türk Qaghans of the seventh century residing on a 'mountain of gold', on which see Pierre Chuvin, "Les ambassades byzantines auprès des premiers souverains turcs de Sogdiane…". *Cahiers d'Asie centrale*.1–2.1996.345–355; cf. esp. p. 350f. If we are not to interpret this phrase literally (and it is difficult to do so), then we may assume it to be a misunderstanding or symbolic interpretation of a gold-colored dais for a throne. The Uyghur Qaghans had a gold-topped tent in the middle of the Ordu Baligh, *on a raised area*, such as that described for Ral-pa-can. They ruled from their tent in something that was at least like a city; Qarabalghasun was described by the Chinese as a *cheng* or "walled city". On this see G. Uray, "The earliest evidence of the use of the Chinese sexagenary cycle in Tibetan", p. 353n, and references there, based on the contemporary evidence presented in "Tamīm ibn Baḥr's journey to the Uyghurs", edited and studied by V. Minorsky in BSOAS.12.1948.283,294f). Khazar Qaghans had a golden tent, and Ibn Faḍlān describes a comitatus of those who are interred with their qaghan. (D.M. Dunlop, *The history of the Jewish Khazars*, pp. 98 and 112.) Golden tents are also mentioned in the *Kitab Dede Qorqut*.

Among other peoples mentioned in early sources, the leaders of the Kereyit had a golden, domed tent (SECRET HISTORY. 186). The Mongol Qan Batu set up his golden tent in the "city" of Sarai on the lower Volga, perhaps as a token of ruling the 'Golden Horde', *altan ordu*. (Chingis Qan awarded golden tents and other golden objects for loyal service; see again 186, when he gives two of his warriors the golden tent belonging to the Kereyit chief.) Möngke Qaghan had the entire inside of his tent covered with gold cloth, according to William of

Rubruck; cf. C. Dawson, *The Mongolian mission*, London & New York, 1955, p. 153. This was the famous *nasij* or "cloth-of-gold", employed in, as far as we know, every court of an important Mongol Qan. It was even extensively used in the golden tents of regional Mongol rulers. It covered virtually the entire interior of some tents, being used for bed-covers, robes, draperies, wall-hangings, etc.

Some of the last photographs of the Dalai Lama in one of his great tent courts show that this tradition continued there. See the photo opposite p. 49 in R. Stein, *Tibetan civilization* (Stanford, 1974), and the description on p. 118f. It cannot be seen in that black-and-white photo, but gold is a prominent element in and on the Dalai Lama's tent.

It is not clear how far back in time the custom of identifying the tent court of the war leader with gold goes (although we speculate below), but it may help explain why the customary tent color for ordinary citizens and military was, and is still often so today, black or darkish. (The Tibetan nomads were 'black tent' nomads—this refers not only to the color but to the shape, what we would call usual 'tent' shape—like the Iranian nomads and Arab nomads. The Mongols and Turks, like the Xiongnu, had round felt 'huts' (yurts) of lighter color. We could suggest a rather sharp 'horizontal' divide between the Turks, etc., in the north and the Tibetans, etc., in the south, all across Asia, but in any case the court-tent of the leadership was marked somehow with gold gild, coloring, etc.)

The prominence of such a color scheme is found, again, as early as the Scythians, a people who held gold in the highest esteem and among whom it was used to identify the highest level of their society, the leaders of what is known as the "royal" Scythian tribes. (I. de Rachewiltz suggests the same thing for the Mongols in his analysis of the color symbolism of black, white, and gold at SECRET HISTORY, p. 265f.) Such identification was expressed symbolically in beautifully-made armor and head-dresses of gold found in a kurgan in Kazakhstan; see the picture in Rolle, R., *The world of the Scythians, op. cit.*, p. 49. On p. 47 she speculates that "gold seems to have exerted a magic power of attraction over the Scythians and—as we now know—over the Sakas as well". (Of course, the Khotanese were Sakas.) According to Tshal-pa Kun-dga'-rdo-rje, (rendering Chinese sources), the btsan-pos made gifts of golden armor (*gser khrab*) to the Tang rulers (*Deb ther dmar po*, Pe-cin, 1981, p. 17f). This reminds one of the symbolic gold armor of the warrior-leadership found in Scythian graves.

Thus, gold was used both to mark leaders and their tents for military and administrative purposes, as well as to symbolize their special status. The survival of the custom from the ancient Scythians to the Sakas may provide some explanation for the use of this symbolism among the Tibetans. However, the origins of its transmission, for the Tibetans or other later peoples such as the Turks or Mongols, is not likely so simple. As we see below, Buddhism also likely contributed to, or reinforced, such beliefs.

As we examine Buddhist input, we first note another court symbolism, mentioned above, that spread widely from an early period. A complex of traditions involving a golden dome over a ruler's court seems to have originated in Persia, shows connections with Sassanid traditions, and which, ascribed to Alexander the Great, were later manifest at Rome and even became part of the Prester John tradition. The "golden dome", signifying cosmic rule and identification of the ruler with the sun and astrological values, has been well described in H.P. L'Orange, *Studies on the iconography of cosmic kingship in the ancient world*, pp. 9–50 and 134 in particular. Various connections with mandalaic symbolism and the figure of the Cakravartin may also be seen, but as is so often the case we must ask, What continuity of values, if any, were maintained as the symbolism of a gold (or gold-topped) tent or dome made its way from court to court, culture to culture? Emel Esin has accumulated data to support some continuity shared by Turkic courts in "Turkic and Ilkhanid universal monarch representations and the Cakravartin" (*Proceedings of the twenty-sixth International Congress of Orientalists: New Delhi, 4–10th January, 1964* (New Delhi: Organizing Committee of the Congress, 1968), vol. 2, pp. 86–132).

There is yet another stream of Buddhist influence in Tibetan polity. Its immediate origin may be more easily identifiable, but ultimately it also may partake of the same ancient complex of beliefs which Scythian culture displays.

In the Tibetan and Buddhist traditions, the Cakravartin rules from a 'golden center', *gser gyi sa gzhi*. This most likely relates to a tradition of the primordial preparation of the Cakravartin to rule implied in ancient Indic cosmology, on which see W.R. Kloetzli, *Buddhist cosmology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983, p. 164). (One should note also the motif in the XIYUJI of Xuanzang, wherein Cakravartin kingship is ratified because of the existence of a golden wheel in the center of the earth.) In some way, gold here represents the essence of the earth,

and a Cakravartin, then, possesses power over that earth essence at its center. This helps us understand the importance of both the *gser gyi sa gzhi* and *sa zhag/sa bcud* motifs which occur so regularly along with the mention of the Cakravartin. These elements came into orbit around the idea of the 'Golden Cakravartin', the most noble sort, and there are traditions for its attainment in Buddhism dating back at least to the eighth century in China. On this see H. Inagaki, "Kūkai's Sokushin-jōbutsu-gi (Principle of attaining Buddhahood with the present body)". *Asia major*.17.1972.190–215. Can we find this concept embedded in normative Buddhist cosmology?

The ultimate source for this belief in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition may come from an Abhidharma teaching, the *Lokaprajñapti*, one of the three sections of the *Prajñaptibhāṣya*. The *Prajñaptibhāṣya* is often quoted in the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, which attests its antiquity; on this point see Karl Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian philosophies*, vol. 7 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), p. 104 and 217. Fragments of the *Lokaprajñapti* from Dunhuang have been studied and translated by S. Dietz ("Remarks on four cosmological texts from Tun-huang". *Tibetan studies*, Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1988, pp. 111–117; cf. esp. p. 115f); it teaches that Meru (Ri Rab) and all other mountains rest on a base of gold 80,000 *yojana*s deep. An interesting implication of this teaching is that, in a Buddhist system wherein connections between a ruler and a mountain have also been explicitly stated (see Chapter Four, n. 40), there could be a relationship between a ruler and this golden base as well. Could such a 'golden base' confer some legitimacy on rulership?

This is precisely what we find as a politically important symbol for the Dge-lugs-pa. It is expressed even in providing the basis for the efficacy of a *bsang* rite. The *Bsang mchod phyogs bsgrigs*, published in Beijing in 2003, contains sixty-eight texts from all Chos-pa traditions. The only text which mentions the *gser gyi sa gzhi* is one composed by the Dge-lugs-pa Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang Bstan-'dzin Rgya-mtsho, who lived 1882–1954. The figure of the 'golden base' is used to assert that the rite will succeed because its power issues from the virtuous behavior of the Sangha, radiating signs of its virtue (*dge mtshan*). The power for this is, in turn, based on its connection with the Dalai Lama. He resides at the 'golden base' as, among other things, the creator of Cakravartins. This is consistent with his function as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara sketched in Chapter Four and interpreted by the Fifth Dalai Lama. The quatrain reads, on p. 229 of the *Bsang mchod phyogs*

bsgrigs: *dge 'dun ring lugs gser gyi sa gzhi la / dge mtshan rgya mtsho kun tu 'khyil ba'i drung / dge ba'i 'bras bzang nor bus gang gyur te / dge legs phyogs brgyar 'phel ba'i sdong grogs mdzod*.

When we overview these Central Eurasian religio-political values it is difficult not to picture that some ancient beliefs (similar to those held by the Scythians) were still formative at the same time as similar concepts about gold were preserved in Buddhist cosmological speculation. These two sets of beliefs may ultimately have their source in the same ancient system. In other words, the Abhidharma tradition may have preserved elements of the same set of ancient Indo-European concepts on the relationship between rulers, mountains, and the element gold that had been circulating around Central Eurasia for quite some time.

We have already seen that such ideas remained formative at courts from the early Turkic rulers through those of the Mongols, with their central court as the 'golden center', *altan ordu*, as remarked upon above. The relationship between gold, the color gold, rule, and Cakravartins may thus rest ultimately on ancient cultural symbolisms still widespread at the time of the composition of the *Lokaprajñāpti* and the KVS. The solar nature of Avalokiteśvara as a ruler could be part of this ancient tradition or a later, logical development.

APPENDIX TWO

A BRIEF EXCURSUS ON BON

In 1997 I presented the results of a research effort at Indiana University. This work was motivated by reading Anne-Marie Blondeau and Samten Karmay's "La cerf à la vaste ramure: en guise d'introduction". Struck by the unusual contents of its text, the *Sha ba ru rgyas*, I studied 165 Bon ritual texts around this work. They are contained in four volumes and were composed by authors whose dates are said to range from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries and who lived from the Kailas region through Derge. The volumes centered on *bskang gso* and *Bon skyong* rites (to wit, *Mchog gsum Rgyal ba sras bcas daṅ Bka' skyoṅ dam can rgya mtsho bcas kyi thugs dam bskaṅ ba'i gsuṅ pod*. Solan, H.P.: Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, 1973, 2 vols., and *Bon skyoṅ sgrub thabs bskaṅ gsol bcas*. Solan, H.P.: Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, 1972, 2 vols.).

In brief, although these texts have many elements that distinguish them from normative rituals of the Phyi Dar schools, those elements are not in the rituals. Rather, these reflect the usual Bon emphasis on *smrang* (recitations giving the origin of the anger of a spiritual being, usually caused by human pollution; theogonies; also, egg cosmogonies are common), which are themselves almost always ancillary to the rituals. Their purpose seems to be to give confidence that Bon practitioners understand the correct basis of the problem and thus had an effective ritual means (*bon*) to deal with it. This may well also explain the special details about cosmology and color symbolism these texts often give us. It seems that most defining characteristics of the Bon world-view serve to explain its rituals. For example, egg cosmologies explain why there is a fixed and a chaotic element to existence, giving us a reason for an unsettled world that needs their rites.

Only a few texts in these collections bear a resemblance to the *Sha ba ru rgyas*. One such is a yak-horn rite (*g.yag ru dgra brub las, Gshin Rje'i dug mda'*) with strongly political contents, playing (probably anachronistically) on the ancient division of the "four *ru*" into which the Imperium was divided. Otherwise, most rites are based on Indic models (there are *sādhana*s, *pūjā*s, *stotra*s, *adhyeṣana*s, etc., in a standard mandala system of presentation) and are really not unusual save for the special Bon deities involved.

Those who support the general Bon division of its tradition into more and less ancient forms, more and less "Buddhacized", may have a point. However, two criticisms of this position come to mind immediately. One is that PT1042, asserted to be a Bon document from the Imperial period, but which in its written form may not be older than some of the materials in these collections, bears no resemblance to any known Bon ritual text. The other, more comprehensive observation, is that the Rnying-ma tradition (and even the Gsar-ma traditions, to a lesser extent) also possesses special 'deities' and rites, and has also incorporated many non-normative Buddhist elements and "native" Tibetan concepts. Since Bon has traditionally asserted that it is, in fact, a Buddhist tradition, there is no real problem with such a finding. Given our somewhat clearer understanding of the origins of the Rnying-ma tradition, these overall similarities should not be ignored.

Such essential similarities between Rnying-ma and Bon may indicate a similar path of development. Despite assertions by both to roots in the Imperium, with traditions to support these positions, there is no contemporary evidence for *either* claim. If the present study is correct in pointing out the unique nature of Buddhist culture during the Imperium, so different from the traditions that followed, even though they were profoundly influenced by the former, then the unique nature of both the Bon and Rnying-ma traditions is the result of the fact that they filled the void created by its fall by utilizing a combination of Indian Tantric teachings and local spiritual beliefs. Both used claims of service to the Imperium as *bona fides* to establish these systems in the period of *ca*. 900 to 1050, before schools arose which undertook to remake Tibetan religion on the basis of contemporaneous Indian Buddhist culture. Compared with the chaotic period which immediately followed its fall, the Imperium may have been seen more favorably by many Tibetans at this more distant time. (The lack of importance of the Imperium *per se* to the Gsar-ma schools is likewise evidence for the fact that, when they took root somewhat later, it had ceased to have even much nostalgia value.)

For what it is worth, the earliest reference we have to "Bon-pos" in their stereotypical role as opponents of Buddhists seems to be, again, in the *Sba bzhed* traditions. At SBA BZHED.1982.34 we find an association of Bon-pos with ministers antithetical to Buddhism:…*bon po dang blon po rnams kha log ste chos mi byed / bon bya'o zer bas / Bo-dhi-sa-twa'i zhal nas / rgyal khams gcig tu chos lugs gnyis byung na shin tu sdig che / 'o cag rtsod pa byas la khyed rgyal na nga 'gro bon spel / chos rgyal*

na bon bsnubs la / dam pa'i lha chos bya gsung / slad kyis chos dang bon 'gran par chad nas de la dpang po med. Further on this page we find: *'Phags Yul gyi Bon-pos bdur ba'i bshin* [i.e., *gshin*] *zhugs pa thams cad kyang bse rags su gyur pas / phyin chad bon bgyid du mi gnang bar chad do* [SBA BZHED.1982.34].

This is a document, like PT1042, in which we find interesting details that could be used to argue either for a very early Bon tradition, or to argue that the *Sba bzhed* is, in fact, an important early source for later traditions *about* Bon.

On the one hand, we find the early meaning of *chos* as a neutral term for "ritual method", and this indicates a memory of earlier court vocabulary. However, nearly all other data in this narrative points to a set of later traditions. We begin with the strong advice of the Bodhisattva, i.e., Śāntarakṣita, delivered (at Brag Dmar) to influence Khri Srong Lde Brtsan's policies about Bon. Such motifs are a hallmark of later "Lamaist historiography". Again, we have no evidence that Khri Srong Lde Brtsan created a policy to support Buddhism alone, and such also cannot be inferred from the policies of his successors. It is highly unlikely that monks told, or even advised strongly, that btsan-pos change anything with regard to religious policy, so it is also highly unlikely that the conversation above ever took place, but its invention would have served later Sanghas well when dealing with local rulers. The second quote, centering on funeral rites, is also suspect. The attribution that they were performed by "Indian" Bon-pos, about whom we know nothing else, seems an unnecessary detail, meant perhaps to impress the early Phyi Dar reader who understands the many religious traditions that exist in that land.

However, this assertion could have served another purpose well. We know that later Bon tradition claimed that its religion was practiced in a number of countries, including India. This same passage in the *Sba bzhed* also speaks of protective rites that would thenceforth only be performed by Bon-pos from Zhang Zhung. In other words, it is interesting that we find in this document, and in PT1042, the kernel of three of the most prominent claims by the Bon tradition centuries later: That Bon-pos were in charge of funeral rites, that the Bon tradition was represented from various countries, and that the Bon tradition was in Zhang Zhung.

These assertions are part of a consistent Phyi Dar tradition, but we need to keep in mind that this is because both these documents are, in fact, far removed from the Imperial period. The mention of funeral rites

seems a ratification of the data in PT1042, but again, that text is not Imperial-period, and may not be much older than the *Sba bzhed*. Thus, the data we are given in both are simply early Phyi Dar traditions about Bon which may, in fact, have gained credence because the contents of these works became more widely known, creating a circularity.

These traditions about early Bon are supported by two other conclusions from a study of Bon ritual texts: 1) To the numerous models of Buddhist rituals given above, we may add that the amount of Śaivite and other Indic influences in Bon ritual literature is not of an order beyond what we see in the Rnying-ma tradition, simply a difference of type; and, 2) That we see many more references to the Imperial courts, especially the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, in Rnying-ma ritual materials than we do in Bon materials. It is as if early Bon writers really had little to provide about a position at court beyond generally-known terminology and the appropriation of some details about rites which had later become general knowledge. Such was, nevertheless, sufficient for the authors of the *Sba bzhed* to assume that the Bon tradition *had* occupied such a status, and that there had been a conflict with Sanghas at court, largely over the content of their rituals.

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